



FETTERED FOR LIFE

A Novel

BY

FRANK BARRETT

AUTHOR OF

'FOLLY MORRISON,' 'LADY BIDDY FANE,' 'HONEST DAVIE,' ETC.



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FETTERED FOR LIFE.

CHAPTER XVIII.

I HEAR THE WORST.

FROM the time the iron door closed upon me till daybreak I walked ceaselessly up and down my cell, like a caged beast waiting for its food. A craving for vengeance possessed me, suggesting a hundred wildly impossible schemes of retaliation to my imagination. With a fierce, brutal pleasure I gloated on each mad project for crushing the woman I had loved. I felt that in some way I must visit upon my wife the injury she had inflicted upon me—calling even upon the justice of God to put the means into my hand. At

length physical exhaustion compelled me to rest. Again and again I had drunk from my pitcher to assuage the burning thirst that seemed to be consuming my very vitals, but my food was untouched where the warder had left it by the door.

I sat down on the stool and stared stupidly at the gray patch of light that marked the coming day, my mind succumbing, like my body, to fatigue. I was powerless, even in imagination, to do her further harm. As passion sank into a state of lethargy, reason awoke. The light grew not only on my eyes, it reached my soul, and opened it with tender touch to the reception of better feelings. She herself, my Hebe, floated in with the first ray of sunshine, and stood before me with that ever-remembered look of love and sorrowing reproach in her deep, soft eyes.

‘ Why have I listened greedily to a fiend,

and closed my heart to this angel ?' I asked myself. What evidence was there of this dear woman's treachery and falsehood but the word of one bad man ? By his own showing, that man was a rascal ; by every act and look and word, my wife had proved herself a human angel.

' But she is human,' suggested the lurking demon in my heart. ' Human and weak, or she would not have taken that false step which made her your wife. Is she to be more than human under a blow that makes you less than a man ?' Then Reason took up the argument : ' Supposing there is some foundation for this story—ay, supposing even every word is true that came from that old rascal's lips—what then ? Has your wife done anything which you yourself would not have permitted as some slight alleviation of the misery you have brought upon her ? If she could strike away the fetter that binds her

to you, would you prevent it ? Must she live for ever in solitude because she loved you for a year ? Are you not morally dead ? Is she a Suttee that she should sacrifice her life on your tomb ? Is the law more just that makes her a widow than that which buries you here ? Is she not morally justified in accepting the love and companionship of the man who knows her secret ? Have you not wished her to forget you—to think of you as gone for ever from her world ? Have you not prayed for her happiness ? Was that prayer a lie, offered by a hypocrite ? What is there in you to love ? Why should she not love another and forget you ?'

I could go no further. My clinging heart revolted against such reasoning.

‘ Oh, no, no, no ! ’ I cried, wringing my hands in agony. ‘ You have not forgotten me, darling ! You love me still ! I am not dead to you ! ’

The hope was almost conviction, and it seemed to me now impossible that she could change so quickly, still more that she could connive at my lifelong imprisonment to avoid any sort of calamity that might attend my release. No, not to procure the best the world could give would she prolong my misery by an hour. To think that she could be selfish and cruel was like breaking down a lovely statue of purity. Oh, if I could still believe her pure and die in that belief! Why should not I? Why should I think again of what Beeton had said? It would be easy enough to avoid hearing another word from his vile tongue. Why should I trouble to consider whether he had told the truth or lied? But to live in enforced ignorance of the truth implied doubt. That in itself was a reflection on my wife's honesty. In justice to her I must ascertain all. Surely, if I loved her—if she were worthy of being loved—

I ought not to fear the test. I must cut away the very ground that suspicion rested on, in justice to her. Conscience told me this was the course I ought to take. I felt a better man when I came to that conclusion. Suddenly a means of learning the truth occurred to me, and I determined to use it.

I put down my name to see the governor before going out to work. At dinner-time he came to me.

‘Well, my man, what is it?’ he asked.
‘Want to go on the sick-list?’

‘No, sir, it isn’t that.’

He raised his brows.

‘You look like it,’ said he. ‘Groves told me you were taken queer yesterday afternoon, and you’ve eaten nothing—walked “groggy” —no wonder.’

‘I’ve been breaking the rules——’ I began.

‘Oh! do you want me to punish you?’

‘No, sir ; I’m punished enough. I want you to look over the fault, for I have to ask a favour arising out of it.’

‘What’s the fault ? Out with it.’

‘Talking to a prisoner, sir. I’ve heard bad news from outside : that’s what upset me, and I feel I shan’t be right again till I know the truth.’

‘Your inventions, I suppose. I don’t think I did well to let you go so far.’

‘I wish with all my heart it was nothing but that. I—I—it’s about a personal friend outside—a dear friend. I must know that it’s a lie—all that I heard—before I can go on in the old way : if you would allow me to see a visitor who could tell me the whole truth.’

‘Oh, certainly ! Better see your friend at once and get the doubt off your mind. You may write immediately, and receive a visit on Wednesday.’

I thanked the governor, and wrote at once to Mr. Northcote, begging him to come and see me on Wednesday, and keep his visit a secret from everyone.

Then followed three days and nights of terrible suspense. I had not the moral strength to chase doubt from my mind. The effort to believe what I hoped shook my faith. I would not admit that Hebe could be false, yet the unacknowledged possibility of deception was ever present to my mind. It was like striving to continue a dream in which the lost darling has been restored to the empty heart against the growing sense of reality —the dreadful conviction that the image is but a shade, and that all is lost for ever. Oh ! how I clung to that beautiful image of a pure and faithful wife ! ‘ God help me if I lose this !’ was the cry that came up from my heart.

I quaked with fear when I heard that the

Vicar was waiting to see me. At the last moment I would have refused to see him had I dared to trust in ignorance.

My teeth chattered as I walked across the yard.

‘Why, this is not young Wyndham, surely?’ said Mr. Northcote, under his breath, when I was brought face to face with him.

I was too agitated to speak.

‘They say a man looks as old as he feels,’ said the stout warder cheerfully; ‘and a man doesn’t feel young long in here if he’s got what you may call a conscience on him.’

‘Do you know me, my friend?’ asked the Vicar, with a tone of incredulity in his voice.

‘Yes, Mr. Northcote.’

‘The very voice is altered quite out of recognition,’ he murmured. The shock seemed to be more than he could overcome.

‘He’s one of our best men,’ said the warder, seeing that we were both at a loss for words.

‘A good man don’t talk, and he never sings or the like of that ; so if he’s cheerful and lively before, he’s more likely to change ; his voice gets raspy and dry like—same as my keys would grow rusty if they was hung up and never used.’

‘ You don’t see much change in me, my poor fellow ?’ asked Mr. Northcote, with a pitying tremulousness.

‘ No, sir.’

‘ There you are : that’s what I say,’ put in the warder conclusively, addressing the Vicar with the cheerfulness of a man who feels nothing beyond pride in the justice of his own conclusion. ‘ You are a gentleman, I dare say, as lives a quiet, happy life, one year as comfortable as another ; a nice cheerful home and friends about you ; good food and plenty of it ; nothing to forget, nothing to fret about, nothing to wish for as you cannot ever hope to get——’

He stopped suddenly, and, with a dry cough, went to the end of the room and seated himself. I dared not raise my head to see what was the matter. I knew my old friend had broken down. It is terrible to see others overcome with compassion and grief for your own misfortunes.

Presently the Vicar broke the silence by blowing his nose ; then he said huskily :

‘ I can’t tell you how pleased I was to get your letter—how glad to come here and see you ! It was grievous to think you never saw a friend.’

‘ You know my reasons, sir ?’

‘ Yes ; your chaplain was good enough to make them clear to me when I came about a year ago with the hope of seeing you. He justified the course you had taken, always, of course, hoping that time would render your separation from us no longer a necessity. I hope that change has come, and that now

you will be able to see your old friends from time to time, and find some sort of pleasure in thinking about us.'

'I don't know,' said I; 'I am not sure. A change has come over me lately that has made me hope for a revival of that which I thought must be buried for ever. Perhaps I am wrong; perhaps it would have been better for me to stick to the course I have held so long. That saved me from madness. I don't know what may happen now. For that reason I begged you to say nothing about our meeting to anyone. Until I am quite sure of myself, I should like it to be kept secret.'

'What is it you fear, my dear friend?'

'I cannot tell you. I am thinking about my wife.'

'You need tell me no more. I promise you that not a word of mine, directly or indirectly, shall ever betray that we have met.'

‘Thank you, sir,’ said I, wiping the sweat from my temples.

‘Mrs. Northcote is staying with friends at Scarborough ; she does not know that I have received a letter from you. Even she shall know nothing of this meeting ; though, of course, she would say nothing about it if she knew your feeling in the matter. And now tell me what I can do for you.’

‘Tell me, sir,’ said I, shaking in every limb—‘tell me about the people I knew once. What has happened to them since then ?’

‘To be sure—to be sure,’ said the old gentleman ; and then, collecting his thoughts, he continued : ‘James Phillips has gone away with his wife and family. He couldn’t make presses in the way you and your father did, and the trade dwindled down to nothing ; and now Thomas Boyce has the house, and is trying to make a business by combining house-

decorating and plumbing. You'd hardly know the old place, it is so altered. There's a working-man's club where the Barley Mow stood, and they're making a bridge over the river by the ferry for the new railway.'

He continued to tell of the changes that had been made, but I heard nothing intelligible, through listening only for one name.

'And Mr. Thane,' I said, when he paused; 'does he still live at Ham?'

The question was not likely to raise his suspicion, for supposing that my wife was a servant in the Thanes' household, it was but natural I should wish to hear of its condition.

'Ah, of course—Mr. Thane,' replied the Vicar, evidently turning his thoughts in a direction they had not lately taken. 'He never went back to that house. Indeed, I think he has quite abandoned the idea of making what is called an establishment. I heard that he passes his time in London and

Brighton, resuming there the independent bachelor life he previously led in India. Doubtless it is more in accordance with his tastes. It is late at his time of life to change one's habits, and, of course, there was not that motive for keeping up a large house with carriages, servants, and that sort of thing when his daughter married.'

'Married!' I echoed hoarsely.

'Ah, to be sure, that's news for you. It was after that dreadful affair that the marriage took place. Very soon after, too, I recollect. Or was it before, Kit?'

'Not before—not before,' I muttered, with a secret terror lest that one sweet image of faith and tenderness should be beaten down and effaced by the discovery that she was already married when she knelt beside me, professing devotion and love, in our last meeting.'

'No; now I come to think of it, it must

have been afterwards. For I remember paying them a visit just before they went away to Germany at the big hotel—what was the name of that hotel, just by Apsley House, but on the opposite side of the way ?'

I could not speak. With my hand I made a gesture of impatience which he failed to see, for he was looking down, and drawing his chin between his thumb and finger in the attempt to recollect.

' However, that doesn't matter. I remember quite distinctly, though she was dressed in deep-blue velvet, and beautiful she looked, to be sure, in it; yet not quite as you must remember her when we used to come and look at your work—not so girlish and gay. That was hardly to be expected. It is all coming back to me now. After lunch the Major left us, and we sat over the fire together. I remember we talked about you, my poor fellow. She spoke very feelingly of

your misfortune, and told me how she had tried to see you at Pentonville, and had written letters to you to express her sympathy. You know she always took a great interest in you—more than you imagine, I dare say. She asked me if I would write to you and overcome your repugnance to communicating with your real friends—those who were so distressed on your account. “Tell him to think of his poor wife,” she said. Those words dwelt in my mind: they were spoken with such true pathos.’

‘Fiend of hypocrisy!’ I said to myself, grinding my teeth with rising fury.

‘The Major also—I told you she was married to Major Cleveden, or did I not?’

‘Yes, yes,’ I said.

‘He also spoke most kindly about you, telling me how he had tried to obtain an interview with you in the hope of giving you

consolation, regretting his inability to do anything further in your behalf.'

I startled the Vicar—the warder more perhaps—by a cracked laugh.

'Go on, go on—this amuses me,' I said, through my teeth.

'I am glad of that, my friend. Unfortunately I have very little more to tell you. They have lived abroad best part of the time—in fact, it was only last autumn that they came back to England; and now they are living near Sevenoaks in Kent. They gave Mrs. Northcote and me a most pressing invitation to go there at Christmas, and Hebe—I mean Mrs. Cleveden—wrote again about two months ago asking us to pay her a visit. By-the-bye, she has not forgotten you, Kit. In a postscript she asked if I had heard anything of you. She was always so thoughtful and kind.'

Again I laughed; then I waved my hand for him to continue.

‘To tell you the truth, I could not accept the invitation. In the first place, Mrs. Northcote was indisposed to go, and the second time, as she was not invited, I—I—well, you know, Mrs. Northcote cannot endure being left alone.’

‘Why did not she go?’ I asked harshly, the truth glimmering upon me.

‘To speak candidly, Kit,’ said the old Vicar, after a moment’s hesitation, with his finger on his lip—‘to speak candidly, I fear Mrs. Northcote has ceased to like that dear young lady. I cannot for the life of me tell why, for Mrs. Northcote is not a capricious woman; but she seems to have taken an unaccountable prejudice against Hebe ever since her marriage. Possibly she objects to marriages in which there is such a discrepancy of age. I know she seemed horrified and disgusted when she first heard of the union. But she has, dear soul, old-fashioned

notions, Kit, and her judgment and perception in some cases are strangely weak. She would have had the young lady marry a gentleman of her own age, no doubt; it would have been more in accordance with old notions of romance and sentiment. But it seems to me that in an artificial state of society romance and sentiment have little place, and men and women of the world who have least of it are apparently the most happy. And this marriage is a proof of it, for in her letters my dear Hebe (as I must still call her) speaks in terms of the highest affection and regard for her dear husband——'

I could restrain my passion no longer. Grasping the iron bars before me, I shook them furiously to make him stop and listen to me. I opened my mouth to denounce the woman who called herself the wife of that other man—to call down the curse of Heaven upon her, but my frenzy and rage choked me.

I stood there like a gibbering ape behind the bars, my mouth agape, uttering unintelligible sounds.

‘Here, you must come out of this,’ said the warder, seizing me tightly by the arms; ‘you’re going to have a fit or something. That’s the worst of these quiet ones,’ he added, as he led me away, speaking over his shoulder to the Vicar: ‘They’re bound to burst out some time or other.’

CHAPTER XIX.

A CHANCE OF ESCAPE.

‘I’ve seen ‘em like this before, Jim,’ said the old warder to his mate, when they led me back in speechless madness to my cell. ‘Leave him to himself, poor beggar ; he’ll come round when the fit’s over.’

He was right. When the paroxysm had taken its course, I sank down exhausted in the darkest corner like a beast beaten and tortured to the last stage of endurance. I lived ; there seemed little other difference between me and the bricks and stones against which I lay huddled up. My first feeling of returning animation was a sense of hunger—not physical hunger, but a spiritual craving

for that which was as necessary to my existence as bread to the starving victim of famine — every way as strong, as urgent, as maddening. I must have vengeance, or lose what vestige of reason remained. What was not to be obtained by force must be got by stratagem; that was suggested by the subtle cunning which took the place of wild fury. There is a certain method in every case of madness.

I was sufficiently self-possessed now to look at my position calmly: to reason upon it, as it seemed to me, justly and even generously.

'This is wrong,' I argued with myself. 'Nothing in nature can exist contrary to the laws of right and reason. It is against all justice that the guilty should enjoy the fruits of their crime while their victims rot in unmerited misery. An end must come to that: justice must triumph. My wife has done me

the foulest wrong that ever one human creature inflicted upon another. It would have been a guiltless act in comparison to have thrust a knife into my heart as she bent over me that night. Never mind that. How do we stand now? She has suffered through my folly; I have suffered through her fault. Every day adds to the sum of my misery; every day diminishes her suffering. That's not fair. If we go on that way the balance of misery will be all on my side. It's time to clear off the old scores. If I take her life and my own at the same time, and by the same blow if possible, there'll be an end to the whole wretched business. Never mind if I am still a loser on the transaction; we shall be equal when we lie side by side—dead. Life is not a farce—not a drama, even for us; it's a grim tragedy, and that is how it must end.

How shall I do it? Easy enough with

the first weapon to hand when I come within arm's reach of her treacherous, faithless heart. Weapons ! My naked hands will serve well enough to destroy her. It was Fate that glued my tongue to my palate when I tried to denounce my wife before the old Vicar and the warders. Merely to publish her infamy would be a pitiful and mean vengeance, out of all proportion and harmony with her colossal guilt. Besides, who would believe the word of a convict against her whose looks are all innocence ? The fellow's a maniac, they would say. In that way I should defeat my own purpose. Sevenoaks, Kent : that's where they live—she and the man who helped her to get rid of me. Oh, he may live ; there are scoundrels as bad here, and it isn't him whom I loved and trusted. How am I to get there —how to escape from this place ? That's the question. Not by heedless force. I must avoid the folly of such an attempt. I

must keep my temper under control—not dwell too much on the delight of vengeance until it is quite within my reach. They must suspect nothing if I am to hoodwink them here. Thank Heaven again for choking down the words that would have betrayed me ! I must keep my strength up : feed well, sleep well, go on with my work day by day in the same way as before, keeping the chaplain and everyone else in the dark while I watch and watch for the opportunity which Providence must surely offer for the accomplishment of justice that is more than human. I am but an instrument in the hand of God.

With this new incentive I picked myself up from the ground as I heard the orderlies coming down the corridor with the tea. The warder found me washing my face.

‘ Well, do you feel a bit better now ? ’ he asked.

‘ Yes, sir ; I’m all right again now. I was

a bit upset, not having seen a friend for getting on five years.'

'I said so. I ain't been here thirteen years myself without learning something of human nature. Told the governor he needn't feel anxious about you.'

'No, sir; please tell him, with my respects, that I am much obliged for his consideration, and that I shall be glad to go out just the same as ever to-morrow morning.'

The next morning I went with the gang down to the fields, and there something occurred which to my exalted imagination seemed nothing less than a supernatural interposition.

We were clearing the potato plantation, which lay on the very outskirts of the cultivated land. In one corner was a great bonfire that had been burning for a week, and close by it a stack of potato-haulm and rubbish carted from a newly-tilled patch of moor-

land for consumption. Two men had been occupied for four days in feeding the fire and stacking the rubbish as it came up. It was an envied employment, for the men at this work could talk together to their heart's content. Now, whether Graves, the warder, suspected that these two men meant mischief or not I can't say ; but when we got on to the ground he called one of them back as they were going off to the fire, and, nodding to me, said :

‘ You can have a turn at that job to-day, as you're not over-strong ; a day's digging will do you good, Cowan.’

Cowan looked at me as if he wished me dead, and turned away, muttering to himself.

I joined the other man, whose name was Tilly, a coiner, and we set to work, the warder having given directions as to what each was to do. For half an hour after he was gone we

worked in silence—Tilly looking only less displeased with the change of mate than Cowan. Once or twice I caught him glancing at me with doubt and indecision on his face. At length, when our eyes again met, he said, in the undertone habitual to convicts :

‘ Have you got such a thing as a heart in your body, mate ? ’

‘ What’s that to you ? ’ I asked.

‘ If you had you could help a po’r fellow what’s got a wife and children hard up for the wants of him.’

While I was digesting this hint he went to the heap for a shovelful of rubbish.

‘ And if you hadn’t,’ he added, coming back to my side, ‘ you might stand a chance of helping yourself.’

‘ What do you mean ? ’

‘ No splitting. You know how a splitter gets rounded on here, fust or last.’

‘ I know. No one ever knew me to sneak.

I'm not a fool. Say what you like, or hold your tongue, it's all one to me.'

He fetched a second shovel of rubbish ; and, having given me another searching look, he said :

' If Cowan hadn't been took off, either him or me would have been a free man to-night. One can't get away without the other.'

' Are both to escape together ?'

' No ; one must help the other and stay behind. That's why I asked if you've got a heart in your body.'

' I've got a heart, but I'd give every drop of blood that's in it to be free for forty-eight hours,' said I fiercely.

' You can't get away unless I show you how ; so you might help a po'r fellow and be none the worse off for it ;' and then he made an appeal on behalf of his wife and children that might under other conditions have led me to help him. But I had no feeling of

tenderness. I was impressed with a belief that Providence had put an opportunity in my way that I must use to my own ends.

'No,' said I; 'I won't make a hand stir to save you unless I have an equal chance of escape.'

'Well, I'm game to leave it to chance,' said he, 'same as Cowan and me went, though he's been helping at the job for four days, and you've done nothing. We'll draw lots who's to get away.'

'Right,' said I eagerly. 'And if it is the decree of Heaven, I shall win,' I added to myself, with the conviction that I should succeed.

'First of all, we bind ourselves by all that's square to abide faithfully by the cast. The one who loses to do as much for the other as if it was for his own self.'

'I agree to that.'

'Then presently when I've gone on to the

top of the heap to show myself, and see old Graves nor none of the guard ain't about, we'll draw our lots.'

A shifty look in his eye led me to suspect that if he lost he might suggest some impossible scheme for me to attempt, reserving his own for another occasion. I was already too cunning to be outwitted by another's subtlety.

' You'll have to show me how the thing's to be done before we draw lots,' said I.

' Curse your suspicions,' growled he savagely ; ' I've a good mind to give it up.'

He went off, and for a time left me in fearful doubt whether he would not abandon the scheme ; but presently, to my intense relief, I saw him scramble up the heap and glance all round as he forked the rubbish down.

' It's no good falling out,' he said more cheerfully, when he came back ; ' the chance

might never come again. Graves may take me off to-morrow. Look about you, mate, and tell me if you can see any sign of a hole long enough and deep enough for a cove to lay himself down in.'

I worked my way round the fire, shovelling the stuff on and patting it down, all the while searching the ground round about for the sign of any hole or displacement of earth.

'No,' said I, coming back to Tilly; 'I can see no hole.'

'There is one, though, not six foot from where you're standing. And a nice old job we've had to get the earth out and fill up the place with tater-tops, and we shouldn't a' done it never if the wind hadn't been a blowing down so as we could work in the smoke. See that bit o' red brick over there?'

'Yes.'

'Go over there and make pretend to be scraping the bits together; drive your fork

down close to the brick, and you'll feel the tater-tops underneath.'

I did as he bade me. Standing with one foot beside the brick, I could neither see nor feel any difference between the earth there and the surrounding ground; but when I thrust the fork in, I perceived that Tilly had told the truth. With a look and a nod I expressed my satisfaction on going back.

'We'll bank the fire in before going up for dinner, and when we come back we'll open a vent on this side. I've got a bit o' damp stuff handy, to clap on, that'll make a rare smother; then if the wind 'll only blow this way getting on for dark, we'll lug out the tater-tops, and one of us'll get in for the other to kiver over nice and comfortable in a jiffy. With a bit of green over your head you can breathe pretty well. I've tried it. Now for the draw.'

With the next forkful of rubbish he

brought back two square pieces of paper; both exactly the same size, about an inch square. One was marked with ‘C’ and the other with ‘T.’

‘Poor old Cowan. He’d got everything ready, he had. This is his bit of paper what he was to try his luck on. Here’s his letter, and this here’s mine. You take his’n.’

He gave me the paper marked ‘C,’ stuck his fork in the ground, and having gathered some rubbish up in his arms and thrown it on to the heap, came back to me.

‘Now then, look sharp,’ said he; ‘put your paper alongside mine—on the handle, here.’

I laid my paper beside his, on the top of the fork handle.

‘Come close alongside me,’ said he. ‘Give me your hand, and swear to act square by me as I swear to act square by you.’

I took the oath, holding his hand.

‘Now turn round, and when I say three, blow with me, and the paper as goes furthest from the fork is the winner, and t’other is the loser.’

We turned ; he counted ‘one, two, three,’ and we blew. It seemed ludicrous enough now, but then the fever of hope and dread brought out drops of sweat on our faces.

The papers fluttered in the air and fell within a foot of the ground. The breeze caught up mine and swept it a couple of yards beyond the other.

‘You’ve won, matey,’ said Tilly, in a tone of deep dejection. ‘I don’t bear you no ill-will, but Heaven help my wife and kids !’

CHAPTER XX.

BURIED ALIVE.

As I ate my dinner, I had time to reflect upon the hazardous undertaking before me. I knew that I must be for hours buried alive; that when I broke out of my grave in the night, I must make my way across the wild moor, eluding the men sent out in pursuit; and that before I dared to venture near a town, I must procure some sort of costume to conceal my prison dress. The scheme was desperate enough to daunt, in its very inception, any one but a convict or a madman. It had no terrors for me. I could not even doubt the issue, believing, as I did, that I was the chosen instrument for a Divine vengeance.

‘If the wind don’t change, it’s all up,’ said Tilly, when we were alone again; ‘with the smoke a-blowing that way we can never open the ground, let alone lay you in and kiver you up, without being spotted.’

‘If it isn’t for to-day, it’s for to-morrow,’ I replied calmly.

‘Supposin’ the wind’s contrary to-morrow, or suppose old Graves jobs you off a-diggin’, how then, matey?’

‘I shall escape all the same,’ said I. ‘Do you think Cowan was inspired with the idea of making that pit for nothing? Do you believe he was called away for nothing? Is it nothing that Graves singled me out to take his place—nothing that the same breath of wind carried my piece of paper further than yours?’

‘Well,’ replied Tilly, ‘your questions is perplesking, but, I’ll answer for it, Cowan wouldn’t have been inspired to make that

pit if he'd a-guessed he was scrapin' it out for you. As for old Graves calling him off for nothing, and putting of you in his place, all I can say is I hopes Cowan won't take it nasty and blow on us. With regard to the breeze a-carryin' your lot furder than mine, the on'y remark I've got to make is, damn the breeze !'

We worked for some time in silence, and then, after eyeing me curiously, he said :

'I've been thinking over your argument, mate. It do seem cur'ous that things should turn out one way when they might just as easy turn out another. Are you a religious cove ?'

'I believe in justice,' said I, with a strange feeling of exultation.

'Ah, that's it ! I knew a man who got on wonderful just because he got what he called faith ; and he didn't have to work

hard, nor pick pockets, nor nothing. There must be something in it ; still,' said he, rubbing his stubbly chin, and looking up at the smoke, ' I should feel more confident-like if the wind would change a bit. It won't be amiss, neither, to keep on banking up the fire t'other side.'

Again we worked for some time without speaking.

' I say, if you're a real religious sort of covey,' he said, breaking the silence, ' and if you *could* allow that I've got some kind of a hand in getting you off, you might give my poor old woman a bit of a help when you're safe and comfortable.'

I reflected for a moment, and recollecting the money Mr. Renshaw held at my disposal, I promised I would help his wife if he told me where to find her.

' I'll tell you where to find her for certain,' said he. ' But, first of all, let me know what

you intend to do. If you get away in the dark, which way shall you go ?'

' I shall trust to the guidance of Providence,' said I.

' For a change of togs and a bit of ready money and everything ?' he asked, his eyes growing round with wonder.

I nodded.

' It's a licker !' he said, giving up the mystery of faith with a shake of his head. ' However, if it don't go against your principles, you'd better keep in a straight line with the run of the High Street ; keep on goin' ahead, right over the hollow, ever so fur, till you come to a brook ; and when you come to that brook, take and turn to your left hand, and go on and on along that running water till you reach a bit of a bridge made of wood. Standing on that bridge, if there's any light at all, you'll see a sort of a cottage by the side of the road leading to the bridge,

which might have been a turnpike house once on a time. Most likely there'll be a nightlight burning in one of the windows that will tell you for sure that there's no mistake. You knock three good raps at the door, and when you hear a voice say, "Who's there?" say this, "It's me, Jack Tilly." Then the door will be opened, and a woman will let you in. That woman is my wife, and she'll take care of you for my sake, bless her heart !'

His eyes filled with tears.

'I can't help it,' said he, dashing his cuff up to his face and stamping his heavy foot. 'I thought to hear her voice and see the little 'uns.'

'We've been hopin' and hopin' and looking forwards to it so long,' he continued presently. 'The old woman managed to put by a bit of money out of her earnings, and when she thought she'd got enough, she left

London and took this bit of a house, laying up things for me against the time I should get away ; but her money's all gone, pretty nigh, and she must go back to London, and there's a hend to all our hopes of meeting, unless you give her a bit of help to keep her and the kids alive until another chance turns up. It's all her invention, and her as kept me hopin' to get away. She knew I could never get off the moor without togs and a bit of money ; and I'll tell you how she managed to let me know without getting her letters stopped by the governor. She's a scholard, you know ; a reg'lar fust-class scholard, as writes like a dictionary. Well, I couldn't make it out at fust, how she came to write so badly, and spell her words wrong, till I found out one day that every letter as wasn't square spelling went to make up the words she had to tell me secretly. There's for you ! When I tumbled to it, I took to

spelling bad myself, and that way we've kept up a reglar conversation unbeknown to anyone. Goodness knows when I shall get another chance of cutting away, and then p'rhaps Providence 'll send some other cove to profit by it again. However, matey, I won't grudge you your good fortune if you do a good turn for the missis.'

Our shadows grew longer and longer. At length, Tilly, passing me with his fork, said, with ill-concealed sarcasm :

' If the wind don't change pretty quick, you'll have to make up your mind as Providence don't mean you to hook it to-day.'

At that very moment the column of smoke swirled round and enveloped us. We got out of it, rubbing our smarting eyes, and Tilly choking with the pungent, acrid fumes that had got down his throat.

To me this was a conclusive proof of my

election. I think the effect upon Tilly was scarcely less convincing.

‘There must be something in it,’ he said again, gasping for breath; ‘it’s a warning if ever there was one. Well, now for it, anyways. Come on, matey.’

He made his way into the cloud of smoke, bending down to the ground. I followed close at his heels.

‘Here we are,’ he said through his closed lips as he came to a stop; ‘stick your hands in down there, and lay hold of the stuff in a lump.’

I plunged my hands through the loose earth, and laid hold of the roll of closely-matted haulm. With one or two vigorous jerks we scattered aside the overlying earth, and then a strong and long pull brought up the roll.

‘Back to the fire, out of this! I’m a bustin’,’ he gasped.

His face was purple through holding his breath so long when we met on the side opposite the smoke.

‘I couldn’t have stood it another minute without bustin’,’ said he; ‘and it won’t be amiss to show ourselves. When you see me go down off the top of the heap, you pat your way round the fire into the smoke, and make for the hole again. The wind won’t hold on for ever.’

I obeyed his instructions, and once more we met in the smoke beside the long shallow pit.

‘In you go, matey, and good luck to you,’ said he; ‘the wind’s baffling.’

I threw myself in the hole, and stretched myself out at full length on my face. Tilly stuffed a lump of the haulm about my head, and with furious haste shovelled the loose earth upon me.

‘Mercy on us, the smoke’s going!’ I heard

him mutter. ‘Don’t stir. Time enough when we’re seen. It’s all right ; the smoke’s hanging on to the ground, and rolling right over towards old Graves. I must stamp it down a bit. Never mind if it hurts a little.’ His words grew fainter and fainter as the earth closed deeper and closer over me. The last words I distinguished were : ‘Don’t forget the missis and the youngsters ; be good to ’em.’ But I heard the grating of the shovel above still a little longer ; then that ceased.

‘He has gone back to the fire,’ thought I. ‘We are much of a size, he and I ; by showing himself first in one place, then soon after in another, which is easy enough with the smoke about, no one will suspect that one of the two men is gone. He will do that, without doubt, for the love of his wife and children. . . . Poor wretch ! he would give anything to be lying here in my place, but

what would I give—my chance of liberty, my life—all, to change places with him in the love of one good woman? What a contrast between us—he longing for escape to help the woman whose love for him is pure and noble; I, to take the life of one who is steeped to the lips in infamy! . . . How shall I do it? I must hide in that cottage till my hair is grown and the prison look is worn off my face; then I must go to Sevenoaks and find her out. . . . But how shall I kill her? Oh, I need not trouble my head about that. It is decreed: who can avert the blow? . . . There's the shovel at work again up there; the wind has blown the smoke over me. It would seem marvellous this combination of helpful circumstances if one had no faith but in accident.'

I felt that the earth was being stamped down upon my body. I could not move a muscle: it seemed as if I were encased in

solid concrete. Every minute respiration was becoming more difficult. With each breath a ton of earth seemed added to the weight upon my loins and shoulders.

‘ You’re all right ?’ asked Tilly, his voice sounding far away.

‘ Yes,’ I answered, with as much force as I could muster.

The sense of suffocation—a terror to think of now—gave me no moral uneasiness then. The physical pain was nothing to me ; I knew that God would enable me to live it out.

With less faith in miracles, Tilly had thrust a piece of wood through the ground into the haulm which surrounded my head ; this he carefully withdrew now, leaving a channel for the entrance of air. Nevertheless, the pain of breathing increased ; my face, my tongue, my neck swelled as if the vessels must burst with the blood, forced

upwards from my constricted limbs and body. Then a terrible cramp seized my feet and crept slowly upwards. It was as if my tendons were being dragged from the muscles. My fingers began to tingle, as if they were being powerfully galvanized ; and then the same tearing of nerve and tendon spread up my arms. Without that strange semi-religious confidence in my destiny the torture would have been unendurable, and I must have burst out of the grave in which I lay buried.

Gradually these pains gave place to a numbness in the lower extremities, as though death were stealing upon me, but the suffering from fulness in my head and chest was unabated. I tasted blood in my mouth ; my lips were wet with it.

I was losing consciousness, when, above the gushing and throbbing of the blood in my ears, I distinguished the hurried tramp of feet

above and the report of two shots fired in succession.

'They have found out my escape,' thought I. 'Thank Heaven, one stage in this ordeal is past!'

I had no knowledge how long I had been lying there. If the men had been mustered for return to prison when my absence was discovered, then it must be nearly five. How long must I lie now before it would be dark enough to break out? How could I tell? How could I measure time when every minute must seem an hour? Then the terrible question came to my mind: shall I have the force to move when I dare to venture? All feeling was gone from my limbs; they might be dead and powerless. Could I exist till Tilly came the next morning to find the ground as he left it? Would he not find me dead? Could I endure this suffocation even an hour longer? Must not a vessel burst? As my faith began to waver

my torture increased. Dread of some fearful physical agony beyond any I had yet endured began to madden me.

What were they doing above there ? At one moment I heard the sound of shovels scraping the ground. Had Cowan, learning of my escape and seeing no further hope for himself, told of the means by which I had obtained concealment ? Were the men searching the ground for me ? Was I being dug out like a ferret ? A moment after I felt the heavy thud of earth being thrown down ; I felt it strike the ground over my chest ; it was like a ram being driven into my lungs. Then I could no longer draw breath. What had happened ? Were they burying me deeper and deeper, rendering escape impossible ?

With the convulsive effort of a man at the last point of existence, blind now to the consequences, unconscious of the thing I did, my

limbs contracted violently, and I heaved my shoulders up.

Oh, that first gasp of air! I can give no idea of its effect upon me, for every form of physical relief is inadequate to describe it by comparison. Whether I was safe from discovery, or whether I had betrayed myself, was, at the time, a matter of indifference; it was enough to feel that I breathed freely again.

But presently I noticed that the sound of falling earth still continued; that showed I had not been discovered. ‘How is it,’ I asked myself, ‘that though that terrible weight is removed from my body, and my head is comparatively free, I can see nothing?’

Using my numbed limbs little by little as they regained strength, I raised my body higher. Still all was dark. I lifted my arms cautiously, and found that I was covered

with dry potato haulm. Then the mystery was explained.

The guard, suspecting I had concealed myself in the rubbish-heap, were pulling it down and stacking it in a fresh place, and the lighter stuff had been thrown over the very spot where I lay buried.

CHAPTER XXI.

ALL UP WITH ME !

THE men continued to work upon the heap ; as the new pile grew the rubbish spread wider, and the weight on my body increased, threatening to bury me afresh. But I could use my limbs now without fear of discovery, wriggling myself towards the edge. Now and then I heard the workers' voices. Once I thought I distinguished the governor giving directions ; but I was too deeply smothered for their words to be made out. At length all sounds ceased, the earth ceased to fall, and I concluded that the heap was wholly displaced, and search in that part abandoned. I dared not venture out, however ; for though it seemed that I had

been underground many hours, I could not be sure that the sun had yet set, or that the searchers, suspecting that I was hidden in the earth thereabouts, were not keeping still with the object of leading me to quit my hiding-place.

The enforced rest did me good. I recovered from the first terrible effects of inhumation and got strength. Yet I was not idle; inch by inch I pushed myself outward, until at length, feeling nothing but light litter over my head, I put out my hand and cautiously made an opening through the haulm. To my intense delight, I perceived a star standing out bright and clear in the dark sky.

I pushed my way out yet a little further, but with such slow and steady movements that no sound was audible to my own ear; and then, getting a fair view over the flat ground, I saw the light in the prison beyond the fire; and, nothing breaking the line of

the low stone wall that bounded the plantation on the other side, it stood out straight and black against the lighter sky to the north.

It was not that way I had to go. Princes Town lay to the west, and the run of the single street was south. Because no patrol was in sight, there was greater reason to suppose that one was to be encountered in the direction I must take. He might be stationed on the other side of the heap from which I was emerging ; there was no better spot for observation than in the deep shadow of this mound. Suddenly a short, dry cough convinced me that a man was on guard in the very place I had suspected. I waited five minutes, not stirring a muscle. The man cleared his throat again ; then I heard his steps, and the next moment caught sight of his figure, a rifle in the hollow of his arm, in black silhouette against the gray smoke that

had driven him from his former position. He strolled three or four paces out, and after standing there a minute, as if looking about, he returned to the heap, and came round toward the fire, passing so close to me that I could, by stretching out my hand, have laid hold of his ankle. A wild idea of tripping him up and bolting for it passed through my mind, but I thought better of it and let him pass. He went as far as the fire, kicked a smouldering ember, and returned, again passing within a foot of the litter in which I was hid ; then a little further on he seated himself on the heap, his head and the barrel of his rifle just cropping up above the outline of the rubbish.

Clearly he was posted there for the night. How was I to pass him ?

I looked about me. To the north and west there was not a vestige of smoke ; it must be rolling away to the south-east. If I could get

into it I might follow its course in comparative safety. No guard would be likely to stand in the choking fumes, and they would help to conceal me. But I had to draw myself out of the heap on which the guard was sitting, not more than two or three yards away. Could I do this without making a sound to attract his attention ? The crackling and spluttering of earth in the fire were sufficient, I believed, to mask the noise I might make. It was my last chance, and the attempt must be made.

Silence was not the only necessity. The thing must be done quickly, for a casual glance to the right would reveal me to the guard. I enlarged the hole before me through which I had to creep, at the same time working my body and legs to give them freer passage. When these preparations were made, and I felt that the moment was come for the attempt, I glanced to the left. The head and

the rifle-barrel were no longer in sight. Stretching forward, I perceived the guard's head leaning back, the peak of his cap tilted upwards. The possibility that he had fallen asleep encouraged me. Putting out my hands and digging my fingers deep in the earth, I drew myself out free of the litter; then on my knees I crawled away, keeping close beside the heap till I had the fire full on my left hand, the mass of the heap between me and the guard, and the column of smoke rolling steadily over the ground before me. I got on my feet, made a step forward, took a hurried glance to the right, drew a deep breath of air, and noiselessly plunged into the smoke. On I went as fast as I could run on the loose earth till I came to a stone wall. Putting my hands on top, I vaulted over, prepared for a fall in the deep ditch which I knew lay beyond. In the ditch I stayed to get breath and look about me for a minute or two. Two or three scattered

lights to the right marked the houses in the village. I could see nothing else but the wall I had leaped, the starry sky, and the scrubby moorland. The greatest difficulty was overcome. If I could find the stream and follow it up to the cottage where Tilly's wife would give me refuge, I should be out of danger.

'Oh, I shall escape!' said I to myself, with exultation, as I scrambled up from the ditch into the heather. No power on earth can make me prisoner again.'

An intoxicating sense of triumph was all I felt in this assurance of escape. The fierce passion of a brute was not softened by a single humanizing hope. The sole object before me was to kill my wife and put an end to my own life as soon as possible.'

I singled out a star in the direction I had to take, and, keeping my eyes on it, made my way forward in as straight a line as I could keep—tearing my way through the heather

and scrub, leaping from block to block of granite, reckless alike of pain and danger. In this way I got down into the valley, never stopping till I found myself on soft ground. There I stopped to listen, standing ankle-deep in the ooze. I heard the rushing of water, and, confident that I was now near the stream, I strode on again. Presently I saw the stream before me, its broken waters glittering under the stars; I turned to the left, as Tilly had directed. There was no sign of dawn in the east yet awhile: that was good.

The course of the stream was difficult to follow. At one time a marsh, in which I sank up to the knees, obliged me to wade through the stream. In recrossing it I slipped on a slimy boulder, and was carried down by the current a hundred yards; at another time I lost the stream in making a detour about a mass of scattered rocks too great to scramble

over. These obstructions I should have avoided had I followed the rough path, distinct enough to my sight when my eyes had grown accustomed to the obscurity; but I dared not go from the stream, for fear of missing the bridge I had to find. As time went on, and a little grayness marked the horizon to the east, a dull foreboding crept into my mind that I had not kept a straight line in descending the valley, and by going too far east had struck the stream above the bridge when I turned to the left instead of below it. This fear increased as the sky grew lighter. I might have to go back again; but where should I turn—at which point give up advance as hopeless? It would take hours to retrace my steps; yet my only chance of escape lay in reaching the cottage before daylight. When the sun rose the whole moor would be scoured, and how could I then escape? I said to myself that as soon as

a certain star, that already twinkled feebly in the east, should be extinct, I would turn about. The fear that I might do this at the moment when the cottage might be but a stone's-throw beyond my range of sight urged me on with redoubled energy.

For hours I had heard no sound but the rushing of the stream ; now a strange cry brought me suddenly to a stand amongst the boulders in which I was stumbling along.

‘ Peewit !’

It was not the cry of any bird or animal that I knew ; nor was it human ; yet it might be made by a man. I scanned the way before me with terrible anxiety. Something stood out against the pale green horizon, which might well be the head and body of a man. It moved : whether it approached or receded I could not tell at that distance.

‘ Peewit !’

Again that strange cry. Was it a signal

from a man before to one behind me ? I glanced over my shoulder. A block of stone, the same colour as my drab blouse, rose higher than my head. It was improbable that I had been seen. The object in front moved again. A streak of pale yellow crossed the green sky : the star was gone. Should I go back ? If this thing was a man lying in wait for me, it was probable that the bridge by which one might escape from the moor was not far off.

Still watching intently, it seemed to me that the head, growing every minute clearer against the brighter sky, was round, and not angular, as it would appear in the well-known warder's cap. Then an explanation flashed upon me—it was the scout of some poachers drawing their night-line. The cry, when I heard it again, sounded like a boy's voice. Yet I dared not let myself be seen by him, though an escaped convict

had little to fear from poachers. The streak had widened ; the horizon was yellow now. It was too late to go back, madness to stand still.

Crouching down, I crept out into the moor, intending to make a wide detour and get back to the stream at a safe distance above the boy. With something like despair I noticed that the yellow bar in the sky was flushed above with pink. Just then I struck a path running at right angles with my course. ‘ This must surely lead to the bridge,’ thought I. Without a moment’s hesitation, I turned down towards the stream, following the path, bending as low as I could to be sheltered by the scrubby growth on each side. Presently I again heard the running water. Then I stopped, and, raising my head cautiously, looked all round me ; there was no sign of living creature. I crept on more stealthily than before, and in a few minutes made out a

rough bridge before me. On my hands and knees I crept on to the bridge, and again paused to look around. Once more I fancied I heard the strange cry, ‘ Peewit !’

All was perfectly still save the monotonous rippling of the stream. Just beyond the bridge stood the cottage I sought—a little two-roomed house. No glimmer in the windows was visible ; but the gray light of morning was sufficiently strong now for such a guide to be unnecessary. I stole up to the door, and after a moment’s hesitation rapped softly with my knuckles. After waiting a minute for response, I rapped again louder.

‘ Nail him, Dick !’ cried a voice from the other side of the road, and before I could move a step from the door a man burst from the bush beyond the house, and another leaped over the opposite hedge. I recognised them both at a glance : they were gang-warders !

I struggled to free myself from the vigorous hands that grasped me by the arms and throat ; but I was thrown down, my arms twisted behind me, and in a moment the handcuffs were snapped upon my wrists.

While I still lay gasping on the ground, and the men quietly linked a chain on to the handcuffs, a woman's shriek rose from the bridge.

' Oh, Jack, Jack ! ' she cried, rushing down towards us ; ' don't let them take you ! '

' It ain't your Jack, Mrs. Tilly,' said the warder standing before me ; ' your husband's safe enough in Dartmoor. If it had been Jack, he'd a taken that warning of yours : " Peewit " would have spoilt us.'

Then, too late, I perceived who it was that had stood in the path, and why that warning cry had been given.

It was nearly mid-day when my captors led me into the prison-yard. As the great iron gates swung to behind me, I felt that my last hope of escape was gone.

‘Even God has played me false !’ I muttered.

CHAPTER XXII.

SIX YEARS ON THE PUNISHMENT LIST.

THE chaplain came into the punishment cell where I was waiting to be taken before the governor. I had not seen him for a fortnight. His last visit was made before I heard of my wife's infidelity from Beeton. He came then to bid me 'good-bye,' and told me he was going to Norfolk for a month's shooting. His wife telegraphed to him when she heard of my escape, knowing that he was deeply interested in me.

I rose instinctively as he entered; but the affection I had begun to feel for this man was wholly gone. I had nothing to hope for from him now. Without some such

sentiment gratitude is impossible, even to a philosopher.

Nothing to hope for, nothing to cherish ! What had I ever received that I wished to retain ? All that I had might be taken from me and leave me none the poorer. My very life was a useless burden, to be given up thankfully.

There is but one step from indifference to hatred ; that step I had already trodden. Could I but hate the society that prolonged my existence only to add to my sum of misery, the Providence that had given me life and endowed my being with senses to feel, who had inspired me with hope to torture me with despair ?

Sensible of my degradation, conscious that no man living was more injured or forlorn than myself, I regarded with rancorous envy all who had escaped my fate. As I looked under my lowering brows at the chaplain,

broad-shouldered, robust, with the breezy freshness of moorland freedom in his open face, I asked myself what he had done to enjoy all the blessings of life, what had I done to be denied the lot of a dog.

‘I knew I should find you here,’ said the chaplain, unbuttoning his ulster; ‘no man could hope to escape except by a miracle.’

‘I thought you believed in miracles,’ said I sullenly.

‘What has that to do with it?’ he cried, pausing with his finger on a button, and casting a sharp glance at me as I sank down on the plank bed.

‘A good deal,’ I replied; ‘you led me to believe in them; that’s why I tried to escape.’

‘Your failure need not shake your faith in miracles—if by miracles you mean Divine interposition in your behalf. Would your escape have made you happier or better? I doubt it. Was not your capture the very

interposition you prayed for—providing your escape from something worse than imprisonment? I believe it. Who are you that you should set yourself up as a judge of the righteousness of the Almighty?"

He spoke with unusual sternness, but his voice sank to its customary tenderness as, sitting beside me on the bed and laying his hand on my arm, he said :

' Believe me, the day will come when you will thank Heaven on your knees that the end was not as you willed it. I am no prophet. A fool could prognosticate as much, knowing what I know. I have had time to learn what has taken place since I went away. Renshaw offered to send a cheque for a certain sum to anyone you named. You promised to furnish him an address. You did not know where your wife was. You received a communication from Beeton that threw you into a terrible state of doubt. You sent for a friend,

who confirmed your suspicion ; that suspicion concerned your wife, for you did not send her address to Renshaw—you forgot that he existed, I dare say. Upon the evidence of two witnesses—one a notorious rascal—you condemn your wife, and make a desperate attempt to escape, with the object of inflicting punishment upon her. Is it not so ?'

He waited for my reply. I made no sign.

' It must be so,' he said. ' You would deny it if you had a spark of affection for her ; and what could have extinguished your love for her but the belief that she is no longer worthy of it ? Come, Wyndham ; tell me your trouble. Let me know what this charge is that has been brought against your wife. Let me try and find some explanation of it. You may be sure I shall not pronounce judgment till I have found out the whole truth.'

' I have had enough of the judgment of others,' I said fiercely.

‘ You have no right to complain of that judgment,’ said he calmly.

I looked up furiously at him. ‘ No right to complain of the judgment that made me, an innocent man, a slave !’

‘ No,’ he repeated, fearlessly meeting my wild look with his calm, soft eyes; ‘ you have no right to complain of that judgment; for, upon slighter evidence than that which convicted you in the mind of an impartial judge, you, biassed by passion, condemn the woman whose defence is unheard.’

‘ I will believe no evidence but that of my own senses. She shall defend herself when the time comes.’

‘ When the time comes; and, meanwhile, what are you going to do ?’

‘ Nothing,’ I replied doggedly.

He argued with me for a long while, trying every means that a keen and noble mind could conceive to make me hear reason, to incline

me to merciful action. I made no reply, but sat there in obstinate silence. At length he rose with a sigh, and after taking a turn up the cell came back, and, standing before me, put his hands on my shoulder, and said :

‘No man can stop, Wyndham. We must keep moving until the end—onwards or backwards, upwards or downwards—there’s no standing still.’

He was right. I went from that day backwards and downwards at the same time. Under the chaplain’s influence it might have been otherwise, but it was my misfortune never to see him again. The day before he was to have returned to Dartmoor he was thrown from his horse and killed. The governor himself, with tears in his eyes, told me the news.

‘He took a deep interest in you,’ said he, ‘and thought of you at the last. “Tell poor Wyndham,” he said, “that I meant to bring him back into the right road again. He must

find his way alone, or through the guidance of others now." And now, my man, if you have any love for that kindest and best of friends, any respect for his memory, you will endeavour to fulfil his last wish. He desired you should have this book for a keepsake,' he added, laying down a volume on my shelf; and then he went out, quite overcome by the memory of the friend and fellow-worker he had lost for ever.

I took up the book. It was Darwin's 'Origin of Species.' I never read a page of it, and it was removed by the next chaplain as unfit for me to read.

I was shocked by this sudden loss, and touched by the message to me. While the impression lasted I wavered in the sullen resolution I had taken to abandon myself to the course of events and the prompting of my senses. I even considered how I might begin a new departure; but when I had listened to

the cold and meaningless phrases of the new chaplain, and the book was taken out of my sight, I looked upon the loss of my friend as another blow from that power which had doomed me to destruction.

There was nothing in my life that tended to raise me from the moral lassitude into which I had sunk—much to turn what energy remained into bad channels. Leniently as the governor was disposed to deal with me for the attempted escape, he was compelled to inflict punishment upon me in order to maintain prison discipline, and discourage others from a similar offence. I was degraded to the third class. My blue-and-drab dress was changed for yellow and gray; gruel was given me in place of tea; I no longer took exercise with the good-conduct men, but marched in single file with the worst. In addition to this I was put to work in the quarries, where, with four other

wretches harnessed like beasts to the stone truck, I dragged the blocks from the cutting to the depot. The work was brutalizing and exhaustive to one not yet up to the regular hand's dodge of doing little and feigning much. When I got into my cell in the evening I was done up. I began to nod as soon as I had devoured my gruel. I was unfit for any intellectual exercise, and I certainly had no inclination that way. I never asked for a book—never touched my slate. ‘What's the good?’ I asked myself. When I woke with a shiver from my doze, I would turn into bed and sleep like a log. Relatively this condition was good.

After a time I grew more cunning, and did no more work than my fellows. You have only to hold your breath, and lay your body against the harness when the warden is looking, to make him believe you are straining every muscle. Then going back from the

quarries no more fatigued than if I had done a day's work in the fields, my mind was active enough to need occupation in the evening. My inventive faculty turned now to elaborating schemes of escape and devising means for the purpose. Night after night, week after week, month after month, I toiled at this pursuit, and at length, having hit upon a design that promised success, I put it in execution at the end of a year. It failed, and I again wore yellow and gray for three months.

Not discouraged by this reverse, I once more attempted to get away fifteen months later—that being the third attempt in three years. But this time I knocked down a warder, and was only captured after a desperate struggle with two others; and so I got a dress of black and drab, with the addition of fetters and chains, which I wore night and day for three months. But before

the rivets were filed off, I was again at work upon a plan of escape.

'Oh, I shall get away sooner or later,' said I to myself, as I nursed my chains; 'there are certain things a man can foresee as clearly as death. The luck must turn. It's a game of chance, after all—if it's nothing more. Say that one in a hundred attempts is successful, the man who passes the limit succeeds. But there's skill in the game, and that counts for something. I won't be in a hurry about this next one. There's plenty of time. Three months or three years makes no difference to me. I'm getting patient. Nine years of it, grinding every day like a mill-horse, make a fellow pretty callous about to-morrow or the day after. I won't be satisfied with the first plan that looks all right. I'll lay by half a dozen to choose from. Lots of time. That was a fool's game I played last turn—shamming reform and getting back

into the Agricultural Gang. I won't do it again. Stick to my quarry pals. We're all villains alike. I'll stick to this line: kick up a row, break the rules, keep on the punishment list, tire the whole lot out with watching me, lead them along one false scent after the other, till at last the real attempt shall seem nothing but a feint, and they let me slip under their very noses. I shall get it pretty hot, that's certain. The warders have almost forgotten that they liked me once; they'll turn spiteful before long. No more tea—well, gruel's as good when you're used to it. All privileges knocked off—a precious difference that'll make to me! Do I want to have a visit from her and her husband? Curse them both! Do I want to write to them, or hear from them? Do I want to know whether she is alive or dead? No, not before I am free! Then—I can't think of that and my schemes clearly at the same time. Where was I? I

know—what I may expect. Punishment cell and plank bed, crank and irons—ah! they're the worst to bear. Never mind, there's not an hour's pain, not a lingering torture, no privation, no indignity that I have suffered all these years, that shall not be repaid. What I have received through her she shall have back from me. All that I have endured she shall endure. The stone she has thrown shall fall back upon her herself. I have a good memory. I have kept an account of all I owe. I have it here in my head. Not a single item shall be forgotten when the time comes to settle up between us. If she have a spark of feeling, I will trample on it; if she retain her high spirit, I will break it down. I see things clearer now than I did. Killing is too good for her; it is not enough for me. She shall live and suffer for herself the remorse she could not feel for me. I will keep her alive

as I have been kept alive. I will debase her as she has debased me. She shall lose her womanhood as I have lost my manhood, and become the savage brute I am. We will never part again. We are fettered for life, the one to the other, and when we die, it shall be in a fiendish struggle, and bound together our ruined souls shall be delivered to everlasting fury !'

It was thus that my plans of escape mingled ever with a project of revenge that became every day more diabolical as I yielded to the brutalizing influences about me. To gloat upon a new form of vengeance was the sole indulgence offered to my passions—means of accomplishing it the only employment for my intellectual faculties. As my passion grew, my mental power contracted. It was with difficulty I fixed my mind upon the practical purpose before me. My thoughts wandered away to the contemplation of my victim

writhing under her punishment. More and more often the slate on which I drew diagrams of the prison, the quarry, and their surroundings, with the signs by which I marked the methods of evasion, would slip unnoticed from my knees, and I lost myself in brooding on the shame and suffering in store for my wife. And yet I had sufficient reason left to see the fatal tendency of this self-indulgence. I was conscious that in time I should become the slave of my passions, incapable of any mental effort—a raving maniac, and nothing more.

But I stuck obstinately to my idea of tiring the warders out ; and with some sort of success. I feigned evasion so frequently that they grew careless and negligent. The warders had just enough pride to make them fear ridicule. To be misled by a prisoner, and then laughed at by their comrades, was intolerable. They retaliated by attributing offences to me of which I was innocent. For

nearly six years I was continually on the punishment list. ‘I won’t run after you next time,’ said a warder savagely one day, giving my wrist a screw with a steel cuff called a ‘persuader’; ‘next time I’ll fetch you down with a bullet.’ The governor himself began to lose patience.

‘I don’t know what to do with you,’ said he, when I was taken before him for the second time in a week. ‘For five years you were the best man in the place, and for nearly six you have been the worst. I have treated you with the utmost leniency your misconduct permitted. That has failed. You force me to try the effect of severity, and I warn you that I shall bring you before the Visiting Committee for the next offence, and advise flogging.’

That night I went to sleep in the ferocious contemplation of flogging my wife to death. Before the end of the week I was again

reported. To my astonishment I was sent out to the quarries the next morning without being taken before the governor. The only explanation I could think of was that my case had been reserved for the Visiting Committee. I foresaw that the flogging I had so long escaped was in store for me. But on Sunday there was matter for fresh surprise. After taking my turn in the exercise-yard, instead of going back to the punishment cell, I was led into block No. 4, and lodged with the first-class men. The first thing I did was to unroll the hammock and lie down. It was an age since I had stretched myself out on anything softer than a plank bed. Then I lay wondering what had happened. I found that out in the afternoon.

My innocence had been proved !

CHAPTER XXIII.

I FIND MYSELF A MAN OF MEANS.

My innocence had been proved to the satisfaction of the Secretary of State ; but it took him three weeks to make up his mind before my discharge was sent down. In that interval I was treated as a first-class criminal, and my hair allowed to grow. On the day I quitted Dartmoor a new suit of clothes was given to me, together with three pounds. A warden conducted me to Horrabridge, took a ticket for me, and waited to put me in the train. Discharged prisoners long separated from the world are like children. Some will hang about the same place for several days, unable to determine what to do with their freedom.

That was not my case. For six years I had been meditating what I should do when this time came, and now, impatient to put my scheme into execution, the delay of a few minutes was more intolerable than the lingering months of uncertainty. The warden yawned; I was not an amusing charge. Suddenly struck with an idea which promised entertainment, he said :

‘ Come in here, old man, and I’ll show you what you’ve not seen for eleven years.’

He led me into the little waiting-room, and confronted me with a looking-glass that stood over the fireplace. My surprise was as great as when six or seven years before I had seen my face in a pan of water; the change was even greater.

I had lost flesh under the constant agitation I had suffered. My face was emaciated to the degree of one who has left the sick-bed after a long illness; the bridge of my nose

showed white through the skin ; the nostrils were pinched and drawn down at the angles ; my eyes were deep sunk ; they were no longer blue—iris and pupil seemed merged in one—they looked black under the projecting brows, and had the quick, furtive movement of a hunted beast. There was nothing but cruelty in them, and every line of my face was seamed with hard, vindictive passion. What surprised me most was to find that my hair and short black beard were streaked with gray.

‘ No one would think me but a little over thirty,’ I muttered, with satisfaction.

‘ Why, no ; you look more like as if you were in the fifties ; but look how you’ve been a-going it these six years. I wager people would take you to be more than me, and I’m eight-and-forty.’

‘ Would they ? That’s good.’

‘ Well, you are a rum cove ! I’ve seen old hands look in that glass and burst into tears

to find they're old men ; but most of 'em had someone hanging on to them as they were hopeful of pleasing again.'

' I haven't.'

' No, and worse luck for you,' he said, shaking his head.

I lingered before the glass, trying to catch my profile, noticing my look when I spoke ; infatuated with my own appearance ; delighted with the change in every feature. No young fellow going to see his sweetheart could flatter himself more.

' Come along ; here's the train you were so anxious about just now. There's your ticket ; take care of it. And now I'll say good-bye to you ; but I shan't be surprised if I see you again before long.'

With this he hurried me into a compartment and shut the door. The train filled up at Exeter. Everyone looked at me. No one spoke. That was significant.

A discharged convict is always to be known by the assertive newness of everything he has upon him, and generally by a look of helplessness. On a long journey these peculiarities are sure to be observed, and then charitable or inquisitive people seek to engage him in conversation. I knew that my expression was forbidding, and it lost nothing by the irritable movement of my long limbs and gaunt frame.

I pushed past my fellow-passengers to the door, and was the first on the platform as the train ran in to Waterloo. It was half-past two. I jumped into the first disengaged cab I came to, and gave the driver Mr. Renshaw's address in Westminster.

The clerk in the outer office looked me up and down suspiciously when I asked to see his master.

'What is your business?' he asked.

'Private business.'

‘What’s your name?’

While I hesitated whether to give my real name or another, the door of the inner office opened, and Mr. Renshaw himself appeared. I knew him at the first glance, though he, too, had altered since I saw him first.

‘I want to speak to you privately, Mr. Renshaw,’ I said.

‘About what?’ he asked, looking at his watch, and then at me, with about the same amount of interest.

‘About Christopher Wyndham.’

‘Oh, certainly! Come in here,’ he said at once, in an altered tone. I followed him into his room, where he turned a chair for me, and seated himself on the opposite side of the table. ‘I hope you have come to tell me some good news of that poor fellow.’

‘Do you know me?’ I asked.

He looked at me intently, and, shaking his head, said, ‘No,’ interrogatively.

' You don't remember to have seen me before ?'

' Not to my knowledge,' he said, after another penetrating look.

' My name is Wyndham,' I said.

He started in his chair.

' Not Wyndham the——'

' Yes, Wyndham the convict.'

He was still incredulous. Knitting his brows, he murmured :

' Impossible. I have a clear recollection of a young man certainly not more than thirty, thick-set, with a heavy, thoughtful face.'

' You wouldn't have recognised me then if you had known me eleven years ago. I have lived two lifetimes in prison.'

' But your voice even——'

' I haven't spoken a dozen words together to any living creature for six years. We don't talk in there. It hurts my throat to speak.'

‘ Making every allowance, such a change passes the range of possibility, or, at least, of probability. I must have some proof of your identity ; my memory gives me none.’

I threw down my discharge papers before him.

‘ Is that enough for you ?’ I asked impatiently. ‘ If that is not enough, I will answer any question you like to put about my inventions or the interview we had at Dartmoor about them.’

He examined the papers, and then apologized for doubting my identity. Yet even his apology was made in a tone that showed the doubt yet lingered in his mind.

‘ You have received a pardon ?’ he said, with an effort, to change his idea.

‘ Pardon ! I am set at liberty because there is no longer any excuse for keeping me in slavery.’

I told him what I had learnt from the

governor and the warders. A nobleman's house in Scotland had been broken into and his steward shot. One of the burglars was taken. To save his own neck he gave information that led to the apprehension of his accomplice. At the trial he accused him of other crimes—off and on they had worked together for nearly twenty years—and amongst them of having shot a policeman at Ham in 187—, for which I was tried and convicted. His account of the burglary, of his escape by the garden-wall, his meeting with me, our going through the fog together up the hill towards the park, and there hearing the shot fired that killed Sanders—all so exactly tallied with my statement and the defence made at my trial that it was no longer possible to consider me guilty.

‘ Extraordinary !’ exclaimed Mr. Renshaw.
‘ I have seen nothing about it in the papers.’
‘ Do you read the Scotch papers ?’ I asked.

‘Ah, I overlooked that. A Scotch trial would scarcely be noticed in the London papers, and I see none but them. Just now there are horrors enough in our own country and in Ireland to occupy them. The Home Office is not likely to publish such a terrible miscarriage of justice. It seems almost a sarcasm to congratulate you,’ he added, after regarding me in silence for a minute. ‘Yet without this incident, heavens knows how much longer you might have suffered! I wish our dear friend the chaplain were here to see you at liberty: I may tell you that he was convinced of your innocence from the very first, and against the advice of the governor petitioned the Home Secretary in your behalf not a month before he was killed. His representations no doubt helped to obtain a speedy recognition of your claim to release and compensation.’

In a few savage words I told how I had

been kept waiting three weeks for my discharge, and the amount of compensation that had been given me. He was shocked.

‘When your case is made known——’ he began.

‘But it must not be made known,’ I said, interrupting him. ‘I have made myself known to you because it was necessary; it is just as necessary that I should not be known to anyone else. Can I depend on you to say no more about me than if I had let you know nothing?’

‘Certainly. Your manner led me to suppose that you sought redress for your injuries otherwise——’

‘What do you know of my injuries?’

‘Nothing beyond what I have learnt from you.’

‘You have eyes. Look at me and say if the injuries you see stamped on my face are to be redressed by public sympathy—if I got

it by whining. If my wrongs are to be avenged I shall find surer means than that.'

'Let me beg you, as a friend, to proceed with prudence and moderation,' he said earnestly.

'Moderation! You couldn't ask more if you were my enemy.'

He shifted uneasily in his chair.

'Well, Mr. Wyndham,' said he, 'let me know what I can do for you.'

'Tell me if anything is coming to me from my inventions.'

'Ah! that is a more cheerful subject to talk about. I am happy to tell you that your engine is a success. It has stood the test of time, and its merits are recognised. A thing of that kind takes time to work. However, we have rounded the corner now; orders are coming in; we are turning them out with increasing rapidity; and the supply only just keeps abreast with the demand. The lamp

has been a paying concern from the start, and the sales have gone steadily up year after year. If you would like to come with me into the works and see the practical working of your ideas——’

‘No, I don’t want to see them. I only wish to know what money I am to receive for them.’

‘I cannot tell you exactly without looking in the books; but roughly speaking, the amount due to you—by the way, you are aware that I have paid nothing out on your account, failing to receive any instructions from you as to the person whom——’

‘I know. I promised to send you the name and address of that person, and I didn’t.’

‘I have written to you frequently upon the subject, but for some reason my letters were returned. And our friend the chaplain being no more——’

‘Never mind about that. Tell me what the amount is roughly.’

‘I think I may say that there are about six or seven thousand pounds to your credit in the books.’

‘That’s enough!’ cried I, rising in exultation. ‘That’s enough!’

‘Enough, at any rate, to keep you in easy circumstances while a still greater sum is accumulating.’

‘Easy circumstances!’ It was not that prospect which elated me. I thought only of the means this sum of money afforded for carrying out my scheme of vengeance.

‘When can I have some money?’ I asked.

‘I can let you have a sum for your present requirements now.’

‘Do. Give me twenty pounds.’

Mr. Renshaw bowed, and, taking a cash-box from the safe, said :

‘We had better make an appointment for

an early date—say this day week, if it suits you—to meet here and settle up. At the same time we may come to some arrangement with regard to the future. That will give you time to consult with your friends, and engage a solicitor if you think proper. Shall we say this day week—two o'clock, here ?' he asked, handing me the notes.

' Yes,' said I; and without a word of thanks or farewell I left him.

He must have thought that misfortune had robbed me of reason as well as youth; perhaps he was not far out from the truth.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FURTHER EVIDENCE AGAINST MY WIFE.

THERE was method in my madness, though. My plans were clearly mapped out. In the train I had settled how much might be accomplished in the first day. One object was attained: I had money to supply my needs. The beginning augured well. I had succeeded beyond my expectations. Whoever before heard tell of a man going into prison penniless and coming out a rich man?

The next thing was to see Mr. Northcote. It was important to learn first of all whether the change in my looks would deceive one who knew me well; and, secondly, whether my wife still lived at Sevenoaks.

My feverish impatience made me prefer going to the Great Eastern on foot rather than by a cab ; I felt I could do the distance quicker. I turned out of the Westminster Bridge Road down the New Cut. Before I had gone a hundred yards I felt my knees trembling and a qualm in my stomach ; that reminded me that I had eaten nothing since five o'clock in the morning. A savoury whiff of steam came out from a cookshop. I turned in there, and, seating myself in one of the boxes, waited in dull expectancy, wondering at the same time if I should find the old Vicar still alive. When a girl put a bill of fare before me and asked what I would eat, I stared at her in stupid wonder. It was the first time for eleven years that my taste had been consulted.

That meal did more than anything else to bring me to a sense of my new position.

‘I shall be suspected at once if I don’t behave like an ordinary man,’ thought I.

Impressed with this new necessity, I forced myself to say ‘Thank you’ when the girl brought me change, and afterwards, recollecting that it was customary to give a gratuity to the attendant, I called her back and gave her some coppers. I should not have felt more abashed in kissing the hand of a princess; but I was very well satisfied with myself.

It was half-past eight when I reached Feltenham; but, despite the hour, I resolved to go to the Vicarage. What else could I do? Sleep was out of the question, and an indescribable dread, like that one might feel on looking on the face of a dead brother last seen in health and happiness, forbade me to revisit my old home and the scenes identified with the sweetest hopes of existence.

A buxom young woman came to the gate

when I rang. She told me that Mr. Northcote was at supper.

‘Never mind ; I’ll wait,’ said I. ‘He wouldn’t like me to go away if he knew what I have come about.’

While she was hesitating whether to shut me outside the gate or let me wait inside, an old woman came down from the porch.

‘Surely that must be Jane,’ thought I, recognising her by some undecipherable signs.

She was a hale woman of fifty-two, and looking less, when I last saw her ; now she was a bent, toothless old woman of sixty-three, and looked older.

‘A man wants to see master, mother,’ said the girl.

‘Mother,’ said I to myself, with a still greater shock ; ‘why, then, this young woman must be little Lucy whom I used to carry on my back.’

‘The Vicar has just rung the bell to clear

away ; you can ask if he is disengaged,' said the old woman.

She stayed with me by the gate while her daughter ran into the house, disguising the caution with which she guarded the entry by a few civil remarks about the length of the days, the fineness of the weather, and the prospect of a good hay-crop.

'Yes,' said I, 'the days will begin to draw in soon ;' and then, speaking as clearly as I could, and with as much of my old manner as I could assume, I added a distich that I had heard again and again from her in bygone days :

‘A lover’s vows and a nightingale’s song,
And the days of June are just as long.’

‘Ay, ay,’ said she, with a chuckle, and looking hard at me ; ‘that’s what they sing in my country. I warrant you come from Somerset.’

‘Not far away from there,’ said I grimly,

thinking of the miserable moor in Devonshire.

‘ Well, spite of the fading light, I thought by your looks you must be a West-Country man.’

I had passed that test satisfactorily.

The Vicar came down the path from the house ; a little whiter, a little stouter, a little less firm on his feet than when I last saw him at Dartmoor—that was all the change six years had wrought on him.

‘ Well, my friend, do you wish to speak to me ?’ he asked.

‘ Yes, sir ; I want to ask you a question in private, if it is not too late. It’s about a young man you were very kind to at one time—Kit Wyndham.’

‘ Oh, certainly ! Come with me. Send the lamp into my study, if you please, Jane.’

He led the way across the lawn, and we entered the room by the open French windows.

We sat down face to face in the twilight. There was not a sign of recognition in his manner.

' You know he has a wife,' I began. ' Perhaps you have seen her, and see some likeness in me.'

' No, I have never seen his wife--to my knowledge,' he replied.

' The secret has not come out, then,' thought I. ' It must be easy to her to cheat the world after eleven years of duplicity.'

' May I ask who you are ?' said Mr. Northcote, as I did not break the silence.

' Yes, I am her brother. Do you want to know my name ?'

' No, no,' he replied hastily. ' I would rather not know; the poor fellow wished it to remain a secret. Still, I should be glad to learn that his wife is well—that she wants for nothing.' I was silent, fearing to betray myself. I had, as it were, to feel my way

along this new path. ‘ Do not hesitate to speak openly on that point,’ he continued ; ‘ if I can render any assistance of a pecuniary kind——’

‘ Oh, there is no need of that. She is well enough provided for. But she’s anxious to know something about her husband, and as she can get no answer to her letters, and is not allowed to see him, she thought you might let us know about his welfare.’

‘ Unfortunately,’ he said, ‘ I am in exactly the same position. All my efforts to communicate with the unhappy young man have been of no avail. I can tell you that he is still at Dartmoor and in good health. I have made it a rule to apply for information to the authorities every three months.’

‘ When did you apply last?’ I asked.

‘ Only the week before last. I will write again if——’

‘ No; there is no necessity for that. My

sister can write now ; it never occurred to us to inquire that way. She has written to him, and the letters have come back, with a note stating that Kit is under punishment and not allowed to write or receive letters. So we knew he must be alive, but we couldn't make out why he was always under punishment.'

Lucy brought in the lamp, and I rose as if to go. The Vicar begged me to sit down, and I purposely took a chair close by the table, that the light might fall on my face.

'Now,' thought I, 'if I am to be known by anyone I shall be recognised by this old man, who has known me from a boy, and is prepared for a change by the alteration that astonished him five years ago.'

Holding my hat in my hand, I looked steadily at the lamp before me like one absorbed in despondent reflections. Suddenly

I turned round ; the Vicar's eyes were upon my face ; the only expression in his was one of embarrassed pity.

' I wish with all my heart I could be of service to your sister and her poor husband,' he said.

' We won't think of him any more, sir. It's no use.' Then, after dandling my hat a moment in silence, I said : ' You know that my sister was in service—in Mr. Thane's house. My sister was much attached to Miss Hebe, but she hasn't dared to go and see her. You can understand that she wouldn't like to be known as the wife of a convict. She told me to ask you if you had heard lately from her "young lady," as she calls her.'

' Yes, I heard quite lately. I have the letter here in my pocket.' While he was turning over a handful of letters to find that from my wife, he continued : ' She knows, I suppose, that her former mistress is married.'

‘ Married ?’ I said, feigning astonishment as well as I could.

‘ Oh dear yes. She has been married—why, let me see.’ He paused, holding his head on one side. ‘ Ah, it must be ten years. And I dare say your poor sister will remember her present husband, Major Cleveden.’

‘ I think I have heard her speak of him,’ I replied, trying to keep my feelings under restraint; and then, with still deeper hypocrisy, I said: ‘ The couple are well and happy, I hope, sir ?’

‘ They seem to be perfectly happy, I am pleased to say; but with regard to health, Mrs. Cleveden leaves something for us to desire. They have had to give up a very beautiful home they had in Kent, where I had the pleasure of seeing them once, and spend the winter months in Italy.’

‘ Are they in Italy now ?’

‘No; they returned the week before last, and are now at—here is the letter.’

He laid down the letter. The sight of the well-known and once-beloved handwriting seemed to burn my strained eyes. Having put on his spectacles, the old gentleman proceeded to open the letter.

‘I may without indiscretion, I believe, give you her address, in case your sister might wish to write to Mrs. Cleveden. Here it is: “The Hermitage, Hadleigh, near Torquay, Devonshire.” Would you like me to write it down for you?’

‘No, I shall remember it.’

There was no fear of that!

‘I think she mentions your unhappy brother-in-law’s name somewhere. In old days, when she lived here, she was very fond of seeing his work—now, where is the line?’

I could have told him where to look for it:

in a postscript. The letter was written to know if I were still in safe keeping, and her anxiety was masked under the indifferent aspect of an after-thought.

‘Ah, here it is,’ said the Vicar. ‘“P.S.—Have you heard anything lately of poor Wyndham?” Look, my friend.’

I pushed back the letter as if it were a venomous thing.

‘I can’t read,’ I said hoarsely. ‘You say she is not well?’ I added, gloating over the thought that terror of discovery made her life a torture.

‘No, poor lady. I suppose it is the chest. When she is not in Italy she stops, as you see, somewhere in the South of England. A terrible complaint, and the more distressing when there is a young family growing up about her.’

This was a fresh blow. It had never entered my mind that she could have

children. It was too monstrous to imagine that she should perpetuate her infamy. The Vicar was running his eyes affectionately over the page before him—giving me now and then a scrap from it, about the climate of Italy, or such trifles—or he must have seen the new hate and loathing that convulsed my features. With an effort I conquered my passion, and forced myself to speak calmly.

‘She has children?’

‘Yes, two—a girl and a boy; one not more than two years old.’

As he spoke he closed the letter.

‘Quite a young woman too—not yet thirty,’ he said sadly. Then he closed his eyes as he disengaged his spectacles.

I turned my back on the lamp while he was thus occupied, for I felt the muscles of my face twitching, as if a knife were cutting into my flesh inch by inch. I tried to

reason myself into indifference, seeing the danger of betraying what I felt.

Why had it not occurred to me before that my wife might have children, I asked myself, and why should I be so moved in discovering it now? Did she not stand convicted of even a greater crime than this? Was there still some lingering folly, some unextinguished spark of that old love in me, that this fresh fact about her should cause such a tumult in my breast? What difference could it make to me whether she was childless or a mother? Nay, did it not rather enlarge my scheme of vengeance and facilitate its accomplishment? Let her have as many children as Niobe, and by just as many should her sufferings be multiplied. Supposing that the maternal instinct survived all finer feelings—supposing that she had a common mother's clinging to her brood—might I not strike at her through them? If one by one they are taken from

her, those children, until she stands at last desolate and alone, as I stand now——! I meditated.

The Vicar called me back to myself by asking if I had anywhere to go for the night.

‘Yes, sir,’ said I, collecting my thoughts. ‘It’s about time I went. I was thinking if I had forgotten anything. She’ll be glad to hear all the news. I suppose you answered that letter, and said you had inquired lately about Wyndham?’

He replied that he had.

‘That is well,’ thought I, as I went away; ‘now there are not likely to be any inquiries made at the prison about me for three months. Three months! Oh, I shall be revenged before then!’

CHAPTER XXV.

I SEE MY WIFE.

WHEN I left the parsonage the moon was rising over the coppice of birch before me; a spray crossed it, and a few delicate leaves hung motionless against the bright disk in the still air. A few steps further on I became conscious of the sharp, honeyed scent of sweetbrier. Then from the lilac-bush at the bottom of the Vicarage garden a nightingale purled out the first sad, long-drawn notes of his song. My heart sank aching within me at this appeal to my senses. All fierce visions of a pitiless revenge died away, giving place to an ineffable feeling of loss and regret. I stopped, wondering what it was that beset

me. Then I recollect that it was at this very spot, by the stile on which my hand lay trembling with the return of a long-lost emotion, that Hebe and I had stood on the first night she stole from the house to meet me—when the moon shone, and the nightingale sang, and the sweetbrier gave out its perfume exactly the same as now.

Why did I suffer this memory to shake me thus? Was this the mood in which to carry out my vengeance? At this rate my heart would melt, and my resolution go before one supplicating look from her faithless, treacherous eyes. The sound of a sob, the sight of her tears, would turn me from my purpose. I must think only of her falsehood. She was lying when she whispered ‘I love you.’ It was a piece of acting when she clung to me as if it were impossible to part. It was love of herself, not of me, that lay at the bottom of that false heart.

She was wearied to death of the monotonous life in the Vicarage, irritated by its restrictions. She believed, with the foolish old parson, that a great future was before me, that I should obtain fame and fortune in London by my genius. She desired a place in that greater world to which I was going—saw in my future freedom for herself, and the gratification of her caprices. She feared to lose me—feared that I should forget her, and give another the place she desired.

That was why she consented to a clandestine marriage, and fell in with all the artifice to accomplish it that was suggested to me. Could I, without her ready acquiescence, have proposed a thing that then seemed presumptuous to me? That it was for her own material advantage, and not from disinterested love, she had taken that step, there was proof enough. With what readiness had she accepted her father's proposal to live with

him and her sister in London ; how quickly had she thrown off her simple habits and modest dress to play the *rôle* of a woman in society, and adopt her extravagance ! From the very first she was a hypocrite and a liar. If I had not been a greenhorn—a simple fool—I should have known that she was deceiving me by the consummate art with which she deceived her guardian.

With these reflections I hardened my heart again so that the nightingale's song made no more impression on it than the crunching of the gravel under my heel. I was ashamed of my feebleness, and recollecting the nameless dread with which I had avoided passing by the places that were once dear to me, I now turned my steps that way, visiting one after the other all the spots with which my memories of the past were associated—stopping at every one to recollect what had happened there between Hebe and me, and finding in each

fresh evidence of her heartless selfishness and double-dealing.

‘Now I am a man again !’ I said to myself as I turned without a pang from the window through which I had looked into my old workshop, marking the very spot where I stood when she first came to see my work. I might have said : ‘Now I am a fiend !’ for surely no fiend ever harboured a more infernal hatred than burnt in my breast.

I walked along the London Road until I could go no further, and then I threw myself down under the lee of a hayrick and slept like a dog.

At the roadside inn where I stopped the next morning to eat, an old road-map of England hung against the wall of the parlour. ‘Tor Key’ was marked upon it, and to the west of the road running from Exeter to Dartmouth Haven lay a blank space, across which was written : ‘Here is y^e forest of

Dartmoor.' The position of Tavistock and 'Chegford' showed me whereabouts Princetown lay—not more than twenty miles from Torquay as the crow flies, I reckoned. This suggested a new scheme to my mind that presented advantages above any I had yet formed for the punishment of my wife. The originality of the idea flattered my inventive spirit; the severity of the retribution gratified the craving of my vindictive passion. At the very first I should strike terror into the heart of the woman; the suffering to be inflicted afterwards could be prolonged to the very limit of human endurance, and finally she should be cast off with a burden of shame that she must bear to the end of her life.

'That will do,' thought I cheerfully. 'It can't fail if I go about it cautiously, and do the thing thoroughly. To begin with, I must go to Torquay and examine the ground,' and

with that resolution I started off with long strides for the nearest railway-station.

It was late in the afternoon when I reached Torquay. There was a crowd of well-dressed people on the platform. I saw nothing distinctly but the women's faces—expecting in each to recognise my wife's features. My furtive glances and wild look attracted attention. I felt that everyone observed me; and hurrying out of the station, I took refuge in the first eating-house I came to. I was not afraid that my wife would know me, but I had reasons for wishing not to be seen by her yet awhile.

'Do you know a place called the Hermitage?' I asked, when I was paying the woman for my tea.

She shook her head as she counted the coppers, and then, turning round to an old man, who sat at a table on the other side of the shop, she said :

‘Do you know where the Hermitage is, Mr. Brown?’

‘The Hermitage?—why, that’s Captain Stukely’s place up at Hadleigh. There’s another military gent got it now. Him that drives that little Victoria with the two brown cobs: the old gentleman with the white moustache, and generally got two ladies with him—you know; one’s his wife.’

‘What, her with the pretty hair and that dear little boy?’

The old man nodded and finished his tea; then, putting down his cup, he told me that I had only to go straight up the hill till I came to a house standing in a garden overlooking the bay—a house all corners and red brick—and that was the Hermitage.

‘Hermitage!’ added he, with a reflective smile. ‘They do find some rum names for these new houses, to be sure: what with their Belvideries and their Mounpeliers, and

one thing and another! Precious queer hermitage where there's always three or four servants kept, and visitors coming and going every day.'

'What is a hermitage?' asked the woman, leaning against the wall, and slowly counting the coppers from one hand into the other and back again.

'A hermitage,' replied the man, clearly flattered by this appeal to his knowledge—'a hermitage is a kind of a hole where a man lives all alone by himself.'

'What, like that Mr. Meaders, the artist, up there on the moor?'

'Just that: only hermits are generally pious; and I don't think Mr. Meaders was that, the way I heard him go on one day when the wind blowed his umbrella up in the air one way and carried off his picture another. But a hermit lives like what he did—all alone by hisself, where no one ever goes, doing his

cooking and housekeeping, and all without any female.'

'And a pretty mess he made of it, I'll be bound! Why, what can a man do without a woman?'

'Well, he ain't much wus off than what a woman is without a man. Look at Mrs. Bates: you can't say but what she's gone and made a pretty mess of it along of this very Meaders.'

'I don't see what that's got to do with it,' retorted the woman sharply, resenting the sarcastic tone in which her own words were used against herself.

The man pushed his cup away impatiently.

'She wouldn't have got into no mess if she hadn't been a widder,' said he. 'Why, look here,' he continued, addressing me, 'I'll put it to you, as a man, whether she'd have made a fool of herself if she'd had a husband to think about and look after her.'

I know all about it, for she's my wife's sister-in-law, though we don't speak. Mrs. Bates lives up here in Cross Street, and keeps a little milk - shop. She's got a nice house of furniture, and lets apartments. Well, three years next September this Meaders comes and takes her first floor as a single gent and an artis'; and a pretty artis' he was—no offence to you, I hope.'

' Why should I be offended ?' I asked.

' I didn't know but what you might be in the same line yourself : you've got a sing'lar look, like what most artists has. However, there's some good and some bad, same as with other trades, so you won't take my remarks personal. Well, this Meaders he stayed there six months, taking his draughts of the sea and smoking his pipe as comfortable as could be. Then people began to talk, thinking as he certainly meant stopping on there for good

with Mrs. Bates. Whether he heard this, or whether he found Mrs. Bates was getting a little too warm for him, I can't say; but this I do know, that in the spring he made out as he'd draughted all there was to draught about Torquay, and he must go away where he could draught something fresh. Well, what does this foolish woman do then, thinking she was going to lose him for ever, but she takes and builds him a little cot house in the middle of the moor, where he reckoned to make a fortune draughting the tors and the streams. There he lived, smoking his pipe and painting his pictures, more comfortable than ever, where no Mrs. Bates nor anyone else was likely to bother him from one year's end to the next. He kept a pony, and I'm hanged if he didn't actually ride over to Newton for his baccy and whisky instead of coming here for it! Mrs. Bates she stood it and

stood it as long as she could, and when, what with one rub and another, she couldn't stand it any longer, she took out a summons against him for two years' rent and extras. He didn't take any notice of that. So she had to go to more expense and get another summons; and he didn't take any notice of that. At last she got an execution warrant; but, bless you, when they went to execute him, all they could find of him or his property was the rag he'd used to wipe up his mess of paints. And now there's that poor woman left with a cot house on her hands which no one in the world is likely to see, let alone rent, and a bill as no one in the world is likely to pay, and all through her not having a husband to keep her from making a fool of herself.'

Leaving the shop, I turned in the direction the man had indicated by the jerk of his

thumb, and found Cross Street, and a dairy with the name of Bates over the door. The widow was knitting behind the counter.

'I am told you have a house to let on the moor,' I said.

'Ay, that I have,' she replied, laying down her knitting. 'And a nice little cottage it is—neatly furnished, with linen and everything necessary for a party who might like a nice quiet place out of the noise of the town. I could let it by the month or the season, if you wanted it for the shooting, now.'

I told her I was an artist. She took up her knitting with a regretful shake of the head.

'I'm afraid it wouldn't suit you,' she said. 'I couldn't let it without references.'

'If it suited me I should want to buy it—cash down.'

‘ Bless you, sir, I wouldn’t have said a word about references if I’d known you were an artist of that sort. As for the cottage, it’s sure to please you. My last tenant was an artist, and he lived there best part of three years, and wouldn’t have gone then if circumstances hadn’t obliged him.’

‘ When can I see the place ?’

‘ To-morrow if you like, sir. Are you staying here ?’

‘ No ; at Newton.’

‘ Why, then, I could meet you there. A train gets in about half-past ten, and I have a friend who would lend me his cart to drive over the moor, and his little boy to show the way ; for though I’ve been there more than once, I wouldn’t undertake to find my way to it.’

I promised to be on the platform at Newton the next day when the train came in, and left her.

And now I set out for the Hermitage to find my wife, the palms of my hands wet and cold, my teeth chattering with the agitation of my mind, just as the feverish expectation of meeting her had affected me in the old days when we were lovers.

The light was fading. There were but few people in the road. After passing the last row of villas no one was in sight. Coming to the top of the hill, I caught sight of the Hermitage below—a house of modern-antique kind, all angles and red brick, as the man had described it. It looked pretty enough in the twilight, with the trees about it, the sloping meadow beyond, and the patch of blue sea seen through the cleft of the valley; but how was it to be approached? It looked difficult at that distance, standing back a couple of hundred yards from the road; yet I did not doubt even then that

I should be enabled to see my wife. Accidents had favoured me already, and revived the belief in predestination which had exercised such powerful influence over me before. With a sort of blind confidence I descended the hill, and passed a gate with an avenue beyond, which clearly led to the house. A little further on I stopped instinctively before a gate. There was just light enough to read on the top bar, 'Private Road to the Beach.' That was the way I had to take.

Noiselessly I opened the gate and slipped through into the road. On the left was a row of fir trees; on the right a shrubbery masking the Hermitage grounds; the road lay in deep shadow. I walked along with my eyes on the shrubbery, believing that somewhere there must be a way for the inhabitants of the house to go down to the sea. Presently I found a gate and an

opening through the shrubbery, as I expected. The gate was locked. I climbed over, and followed the path in still deeper shade, until I came to a lawn, and saw the house right before me.

There was now just light enough to distinguish the form of the house and its position. The fall of the ground, the narrow space between the shrubbery and the building, showed me that I faced the side of the house. There was no light in any of the windows — no sign of living creature there. But as I stood looking about me, like one who fails to find something that has been promised, I heard a muffled sound of voices, and the sharper chink of glass. Creeping down by the edge of the shrubbery I reached a point that lined with the front of the house. Light came from the rooms there. I saw it reflected on a table with glass and a couple of garden chairs that

stood beside it on the turfed terrace. The night was hot and close.

'They are at supper in there,' I argued; 'the windows must open to the ground for the light to strike the grass like that.'

The sounds of the supper-table were more distinct. I started suddenly as if I had been struck in the face, hearing a light laugh that I knew was Hebe's.

The lawn followed the natural sweep of the hill, but a terrace had been raised to form a level walk round the house. Its outer edge stood breast high above the lawn. Bending down, I passed quickly across the open strip of lawn, and then, skirting the terrace, I came round to the front of the house. A flower-bed ran along the foot of the terrace; creeping plants were trained over the wall and up the open iron-work above. I knew when I was opposite the window by the light on the foliage.

With my hat drawn down over my brows I slowly raised myself from a crouching posture, until my eyes were above the level of the terrace. My wife was there, seated at the head of the table, in the room, not more than eight or nine yards from me.

Not for an instant did I doubt her identity. At that distance, in the soft light that fell upon her, I could see no change in her face. She was as I left her.

‘She can have neither heart nor conscience,’ I said to myself.

There were others at the table. I heard their voices, but I did not see them. My eyes were riveted on her.

She sat in a listening attitude. I fancied there was a smile on her face. She spoke, but in too low a tone for me to catch the words; yet the sound of her voice was as familiar to my ear as though the years

that had separated us were no more than hours.

Presently I heard a man's voice say, 'Here's the boy come to say "Good-night." ' Then my wife's face lit up as she raised her head and looked across the room.

A maid came to her side, carrying a child in her arms. Pushing back her chair, my wife held out her hands and took the child on her lap. He knelt there and clasped her about the neck, laying his cheek beside hers. She held him in her arms pressed to her bosom, rocking from side to side playfully for a minute, and then gave him up to the nurse.

'Say "Good-night, mamma!" ' said the maid, in a clear, high voice that reached my ear distinctly.

The child was silent, looking round the table, and then hiding his face on the maid's shoulder. She spoke to him again, using the

same words. The child replied without lifting his head. The words were inaudible, but they drew a peal of laughter from those who heard them. Clear above the sound of mingled merriment my wife's light laugh rang out. It was to me like the last maddening blow of the knout.

'Laugh well ! laugh well !' I muttered, grinding my heel into the plants under my feet. ' You will not laugh long !'

CHAPTER XXVI.

PREPARATIONS.

‘THERE, that’s the little cottage, sir,’ said Mrs. Bates, as we jolted slowly over the rugged moor.

Looking around, I saw nothing but the undulating moor, the scrubby growth interspersed with blocks of granite, with here and there pools of water connected by a thin stream.

‘Down there by the water, against that fine pile of stones,’ she added.

Thus directed, I made out the hut. Built of granite and roofed with gray slates, it was hardly distinguishable from the rocks that sheltered it. I nodded.

'For an artist who is fond of Nature,' she pursued, 'there's a plenty here to satisfy him.'

I looked about me again, with another nod. It was desolate and wild enough to suit even my requirements. We seemed to be at the bottom of an immense basin edged with tors that touched the sky. There was not a tree to break the monotonous sweep of moorland. For best part of three hours we had been jolting painfully along a rugged track, that the woman might well have doubted her ability to follow, without seeing a sign of human being.

'This is the garden,' said Mrs. Bates, as the cart drew up before a ragged patch of ground overgrown with weeds and surrounded by a rough stone wall. 'The last tenant was not partial to gardening, and he let it go a bit wild.'

I liked the look of that neglected patch.

It was in harmony with its surroundings, and added to the air of desolation and abandonment that characterized the house. But I said nothing. I had not opened my lips from the time we got upon the moor. My thoughts were elsewhere. Misery had long ago dulled my sense of humour, or I might have found matter for amusement in studying my companion.

The poor woman had started with at least an appearance of hope. She had done her best to draw me out of my sombre mood by cheerful comments on the weather and the few objects of interest that presented themselves by the wayside. Little by little her courage flagged under the discouraging influence of my silence, until at last she sank into a state of dejection from which she could only arouse herself at intervals by effort. The failure of this last attempt to propitiate me in favour of her property

seemed to exhaust her resources, and with a heavy sigh she got slowly down from the cart. In silence she unlocked and pushed open the door.

‘ Shall I take down the window-shutters ?’ she asked, in a tone of despondency.

‘ No,’ I answered. ‘ There is light enough to see all I want.’

‘ Well, you said you wanted solitude,’ she remonstrated.

‘ Where does that step-ladder lead to ?’

‘ The bedroom ; it’s just the same size as this. Do you want to go up ?’

‘ No.’

‘ I didn’t say it was a villa residence, did I ?’

‘ Where’s the stable ?’

‘ Round at the back. There’s an oven as well. You don’t want to see them, I suppose ?’

‘ No.’

‘ Well, it’s my loss as well as yours coming here ; only I’ve got to pay the cart extra, not to mention my return-ticket from Torquay.’

‘ How much do you want for the place ?’

She looked at me to see if I were joking, and finding me as gloomy as ever, she replied, in a tone of desperation :

‘ Well, to be rid of it—there, if I wouldn’t take a hundred pounds — furniture, linen, every blessed thing !’

‘ Will you take ten pounds now and the rest in a week’s time ?’ I asked, producing one of the notes I had received from Mr. Renshaw.

‘ That I will,’ cried she eagerly. ‘ Why, if I didn’t think the moor had frightened you off at the very first. But there ! there’s no knowing how to judge you gentlemen artists.’

She rambled on for some time, and then

proposed that we should go back to Newton, where she would write me out a receipt for my money.

‘ You can send a receipt next week when you get the rest of the money. Now I am here I shall stay. I want to begin work at once.’

Strange work it was I was so eager to begin !

When the cart with Mrs. Bates and the baker who had brought us was gone, I made a closer examination of my property. There was a shed and a stable at the back of the house. In the shed were a meat-safe, a filter, some deal planks, a bench, and a box of tools. A ladder in the stable led up into a loft, where I found hay, straw, and half a sack of oats.

I went into the house. There was one room below and another above. The room below had one long window facing the north,

closed with outside shutters like a shop-front, and hung inside with a green curtain; the walls were lime-washed, daubed here and there with smudges of paint where the artist had cleaned his palette-knife. On one side was a kitchener, with cooking utensils hung against a board above; on the other was a sink, with a rack of plates above it, and a dresser and shelves filled with crockery and kitchen things. A cupboard in a corner contained other domestic requisites. These things, with a table and four chairs, comprised the furniture of what had evidently served the purpose of a studio, a kitchen, a dining and a living room.

The room above had also served as a studio. The north slope of the roof was glazed to admit the light. There was no other window.

Beside the smears of the palette-knife were numerous sketches roughly done in charcoal

on the wall. There were a chest of drawers, two filled with linen, and the usual furniture of a bedroom. In one corner stood a broken easel and a big shrimping-net. What use could the net be to him on the moor, twenty miles from the sea? I wondered. But the mystery was explained when I caught sight of a rough sketch of a fisherman and his wife coming over a bleak stretch of moorland with a glimpse of sea beyond. 'If he had the net here for his model, he must have had the costumes,' thought I, looking round the room. There was a corner cupboard similar to that below. I opened it, and amongst old baskets and a lot of rubbish I found one of those nondescript suits of oilcloth and rags which shrimpers wear, a frayed skirt and jacket, and a tarpaulin suit that possibly had served the artist's own use for painting out of doors in rough weather. I stood looking at these things with half-shut eyes—as the artist him-

self might have looked at them in planning how they should be employed to realize a pre-conceived idea.

Then I turned about to examine the opening in the floor through which one descended by the step-ladder to the room below. It closed with a trap that opened upwards, and rested against a handrail; there was a bolt on the top to secure it when in its place. The top of the step-ladder was screwed to a joist.

'If the bolt were set underneath the trap, and the screws taken out of the ladder to make it removable, this room would be perfect,' thought I. 'No one could get out except by breaking through the skylight and dropping from the roof. I'll set about that at once.'

I fetched the tool-box from the shed, and, taking off my coat, set to work. My hands were clumsy at first, not having touched a

tool for eleven years ; but my heart was in the job, and in a quarter of an hour the alterations were made.

‘ There, that’s something done,’ said I, as I drew away the step-ladder and looked up at the close-bolted trap-door.

CHAPTER XXVII.

I GET INTO THE HERMITAGE.

IT took me ten days to complete my preparations, and some of the nights as well. First of all I made a journey to Tavistock, where I bought a pony, a bushel of flour, and a quantity of tinned meat. But as I failed to find what I wanted at any of the drapers' or tailors' there, I had to make another journey the next day to Exeter. After trying a good many shops, I found at last some tweed cloth to my taste, some coarse canvas, and a pair of red-striped stockings. Besides these I bought a dozen buttons, a packet of needles, some thread, a pair of scissors, and a large thimble.

These things, with what I had from Tavistock, seemed to be all I needed ; but, catching sight of a pair of rusty handcuffs that hung up outside a curiosity shop in a back street, I purchased them, and also a long clasp knife with a buckhorn handle that lay temptingly on the stall board.

Having got my materials home, I carried them into the upper room, where I thought it advisable to do my work, lest by any accident some pedestrian, losing his way, might discover the hut and come in ; and here I proceeded to make up the tweed into a suit of clothes as nearly like those I had worn during the years I had been a bad-conduct man at Dartmouth as I could manage. It was a long and tiresome job, for I knew nothing about tailoring, and could at first hardly hold the needle in my stiff fingers ; however, I succeeded at last in finishing a pair of breeches and a jacket to fit me fairly—one side black

and the other drab—the colours on one leg the reverse of those on the other, and the same with the sleeves. The canvas I made up into a loose slop jacket, decorating it freely with the broad arrow, which I painted with a brush the artist had left under his bed and a tube of colour I had bought for the purpose. For the finishing touch I trod the suit into a heap of cinders and earth to destroy the effect of newness. When all was done I felt very well satisfied.

I had been compelled to quit my tailoring one day in order to go up to London and settle my affairs with Mr. Renshaw. On this occasion I managed to behave myself a little more like a civilized being than formerly. I even ventured to make a sort of apology for my previous behaviour.

‘ My dear sir,’ said he, ‘ who could expect you to behave like an ordinary man after such a long term of suffering ? The only wonder

is that, under the sense of injustice and wrong,
you preserved your reason.'

Having concluded that business satisfactorily, and received two hundred pounds on account, with permission to draw upon Mr. Renshaw for any further sums I might require up to a thousand pounds at a couple of days' notice, I took the train back to Torquay, where I paid Mrs. Bates the remainder of the purchase-money.

'What name shall I put, sir?' she asked, when she sat down to write a receipt.

'John Gregory,' I answered, without hesitation, having settled beforehand the new *alias* I would take.

From Torquay I walked to the Chequers, a roadside inn that lies between Newton and Totnes, where I stayed until it was time to close, wishing to make sure that I could find my way home in the dark. I had already made the journey four times, leaving the hut

while it was yet light and returning in the semi-darkness of a summer's night. Although the sky was overcast that night, I reached my destination without once going astray.

At last the day came to take the next great step. I was up at daybreak collecting all the shreds of cloth and canvas that littered the floor. These I burnt in the stove, leaving not a morsel of thread or stuff that could betray me. Then, taking the scissors and placing myself before the glass, I set to work clipping my beard and hair, which had grown to a respectable length, as close to my face and head as the steel would go. It was a more difficult job than I expected, and I gave myself more than one jag in clipping my hair behind; but in the end I had the grim satisfaction of seeing my head converted from the look of an honest man into the likeness of a grisly convict. I was better pleased still when I looked at myself again, dressed in

barred stockings and the hideous clothes I had made. There was no mistaking me for an honest man then. My savage delight added to the brutal ferocity in my face. I looked as if I had been chained up in a prison half my lifetime and had deserved my punishment. I had made a pocket inside my jacket ; in this I put my clasp knife and the handcuffs, after breaking the link that joined the two fetters together.

Over this costume I drew on the ragged suit of oilskin and the battered sou'-wester which had served the artist's model in the character of a shrimper. Again I looked at myself in the glass with satisfaction. My long thin face, seen under the sou'-wester tied down under the chin with a ragged coloured handkerchief, looked, in its haggard misery, like enough to one of the unfortunate wretches, weather-worn and starved, who get a meagre subsistence by dredging the shores.

There were craving and misery in my sunken eyes and fallen cheeks ; in the hard lines of my face the signs of long years passed in dull dejection and utter hopelessness. I should pass muster.

I gave the pony enough food for the day, put something for my own sustenance in the basket slung on my back, and then, after a last careful look round the rooms to see that there was nothing wanting in their studied arrangement, I shouldered the shrimping-net, closed the door behind me, and started off across the moor.

It must have been between five and six in the evening when I got down to the shore, a mile or so beyond the Hermitage on the Teignmouth side. It was my intention to wait about until nightfall here, but seeing a fleet of yachts skimming across the bay and a number of small boats in shore, it struck me that a regatta was being held, and that the present time would

be as favourable as any for getting into the house. The day had been brilliant, and I conjectured that my pleasure-loving wife would not lose this opportunity of amusing herself and displaying her finery. My impatience to be doing decided me to make the attempt.

I hastened along the beach till I came to a point just opposite the opening to the private road which commanded a full view of the house and the sloping lawn on which it stood. A group of servants, distinguishable at that distance by their light print dresses and white caps, stood on the terrace, and one was looking out over the bay through a telescope.

‘When the cat’s away the mice may play,’ said I to myself. ‘They wouldn’t be there if my wife were at home.’

There was not a minute to be lost. I threw aside my net, and ran up the road until I reached the iron gate opening upon the side-path to the house. It was unfastened now.

I passed through and made my way along the shrubbery. Presently I came to where the path forked in two directions. I had not noticed a second path in the dark; which should I take now? While I was standing in doubt I suddenly heard a footstep, and before I could make an attempt to conceal myself a plainly-dressed, middle-aged woman came in sight.

I had decided what I must do if I encountered anyone, and so, sinking my head in my shoulders, and assuming an abject expression, I muttered something about charity and a sick wife.

The woman looked at me, and put her hand in her pocket; after a moment's search she said:

'I haven't never a penny, my poor fellow; but the servants are up there at the house, and for sure they'll find you some broken victuals.'

She pointed the way along the path she had

descended by a movement of the hand, and went on, while I mumbled out my thanks.

As soon as she was out of sight, I took, not the path she had indicated, but the other, perceiving that it led, in all probability, to the back of the house, where the kitchen would be situated.

I was not mistaken ; in a couple of minutes I was at the kitchen door ; in another I had reached the passage beyond ; in two more I was half-way up the bedroom stairs. There I stopped short, hearing voices and laughter. Looking over my shoulder downward I saw a couple of girls just entering the hall by the door opening upon the terrace. They must see me if they looked up. What should I do ? The rustle of my oilskin trousers would attract their attention if I moved quickly.

‘ Oh, my custards ! I quite forgot them ! ’ cried one of the women, clapping her hands ; then the pair bolted past the stairs on their

way to the kitchen, one laughing and the other scolding.

And now I had escaped this danger, how was I to escape the next? At any moment a servant might come upstairs, and I must find a secure hiding-place before that, or lose the game. How was I to distinguish my wife's room from the rest? One after the other I opened the doors quickly and glanced in, trusting to my instinct—to some sign characteristic of my wife's character—for direction.

An indiarubber ball on a chest of drawers and a child's bedstead beyond caught my eye.

'Her child sleeps here,' thought I, with a stealthy step forward. A half-opened door showed that another room was beyond.

'That must be the mother's,' said I.
'She's fond of her brat—I saw that.'

Oh, I was sure the room was hers when I slipped into it and looked about me. I know not how I recognised it. The other rooms

were not less elegantly furnished, the ornaments not less rich, the taste in their arrangement not less delicate ; but in this there was an indefinable grace that associated itself with all my memories of Hebe.

More voices in the hall below gave me no time for consideration. It was clear that the race was ended, and that before long the family would return for dinner. I looked about me for a place of concealment.

‘There is no better place than that,’ thought I, as I looked at her bed ; and, slipping the basket from my shoulders and dropping on my knees, I pushed it under the valance, and crawled after it, saying to myself :

‘I shall be well enough here if the terrors of a guilty conscience do not prompt her to look under the bed.’

CHAPTER XXVIII.

I MAKE MY WIFE PRISONER.

THERE was perfect silence in the house for the best part of an hour, and then it was abruptly broken by the sound of voices below. I distinguished my wife's voice at once, mingled with the prattle of her children and the measured tones of the Major and others that were unknown to me. Presently there was a rustle of dresses in the passage. A lady and my wife stayed at the further door to chat—the running cadence broken now and then by a little laugh ; a drawer was opened in the next room ; a young voice hummed a tune. The conversation ended with another little laugh, and Hebe came into the room. Her feet were close to the valance when she

seated herself. I could see the buckles on her shoes and the clock on her silk stockings. I knew it was she.

'Shall I wear my gray dress, mamma?' called the child from the next room.

'Yes, dear,' answered the well-known voice. 'Mary will be here to help you when she has dressed Lenny.'

It was the girl, her elder child, in the next room.

When my wife had dressed for dinner she seated herself again in the chair by the bedside. Once or twice the child came into the room. She was singing and chatting all the time. At length she ran downstairs, and my wife and I were alone together, she within arms' reach of me.

'You would not sit there so complacently,' thought I, 'if you knew you were within reach of the man you threw into prison for life. If your life were worth saving, Provi-

dence would warn you that I have escaped, and am lying here, with murder in my soul and a knife in my hand, ready to plunge into your faithless, wicked heart.'

I had to think of the more terrible vengeance in store for her in order to overcome the temptation of taking that which was offered me now. The time had not yet come: I must wait yet a little longer.

A gong sounded in the hall, and she left the room. A long, eventless interval followed, in which I had time to consider what course I should take if my original plan were upset.

The servant who came up to arrange the room upset a box; a ring fell on the ground and rolled under the bed. Happily it came within my reach, and I rolled it out again. The woman found it, and there the danger of discovery ended. But it showed me how easily an accident might precipitate the catastrophe.

‘Suppose the Major should come up at the same time as my wife,’ I said to myself. Well, if the worst came to the worst, I would put an end to him, and Hebe would then have to shield a real murderer from discovery.

A little later the child and her maid came into the next room. When the maid was about to leave her she said :

‘Tell mamma to come up soon, Mary ; say I can’t go to sleep till she comes.’

‘Why, there’s nothing to be frightened of, miss. There, I’ll go and look in the next room.’

She came in, and having made a pretence of looking round, returned.

‘I’ve looked everywhere,’ she said ; ‘it’s silly to go on like this every night.’

‘But you’ll tell mamma I’m frightened, won’t you ?’

The maid promised, and went downstairs, leaving a light burning in the child’s room.

I got ready now—untying the cord about my waist, and opening the oilskin coat, so that my hideous convict's slop might be seen ; then I drew myself close to the valance, in readiness to slip out.

Time dragged on. It seemed to me she would never come. Cramped with lying so long in one position I turned upon my back and stretched out my arms. My hand struck the basket and overturned it. The next moment I heard the child's feet pattering across the floor. She went to the head of the stairs, and called out, in a high, tremulous voice :

‘Mamma ! mamma !’

A door was opened downstairs, and Hebe cried, in gentle remonstrance :

‘Oh, my child, go back ! We are all coming up now.’

The feet pattered back ; the voices on the stairs drew nearer and nearer. My wife came

into the next room. I heard her caressing and soothing the child, who was whimpering plaintively. There were talking and laughter in the passage outside, ending in mutual ‘good-nights.’ Then the Major entered the next room.

‘Not crying, surely, little one !’ said he. ‘Do you call yourself a soldier’s daughter ? Afraid of “the man,” as usual, hey ? Shall I go and fetch my sword ?’

‘No, no ! Go away and leave me all alone with mamma,’ said the child. ‘Go to your own room.’

‘I’m to be banished, am I ? Well, you’ll have to give me a kiss before I go. There,’ said he, after the kiss, ‘now I’ll go. Good-night.’ Then, in another tone, he added, ‘Good-night, dear,’ and I knew that the kiss which followed was my wife’s.

‘The last !’ said I to myself.

One would have thought my wife was the incarnation of sweetness, gentleness, and purity to hear her murmuring in her child's ear of faith in God and His unfailing watchfulness over those who loved Him.

'I will try to be a brave little girl,' said the child, with a shivering sob; 'but, indeed, mamma, I thought I heard a noise in your bedroom.'

The mother continued to murmur words of love and encouragement for some time; then she stopped, and presently came with noiseless steps into her own room, bringing the lamp with her, and softly closing the door. The child slept.

When the lamp was set on the table that stood in the middle of the room, the light shone brightly through the blue and white chintz of the bed-hangings. This was what I wanted.

She went to the toilet-table. I saw her

skirt, my eyes being on a level with the floor. Her side was towards me.

I took the broken handcuff from my pocket. One fetter I pushed out beyond the valance into the light; the other I slipped on my right wrist. Then I waited in breathless suspense, watching her skirt.

She moved from the table as if to cross the room. Just opposite the carefully polished fetter she stopped suddenly with a long-drawn breath. For a moment she stood motionless; then she bent down and picked up the iron, her white, thin fingers trembling violently. I slid out my hand into the light, the sleeve drawn back to show the fetter on my wrist. God knows what ideas that broken fetter conjured up in her mind! A minute afterwards the fetter fell from her hands, and I heard a stifled scream. She had caught sight of my begrimed hand lying there open on the floor.

She tottered back towards the toilet-table for support. I knew her eyes were on my right hand. With my left I slowly raised the valance, with a savage joy in the awful terror that stealthy movement and the fearful uncertainty were inspiring.

Under the raised valance I little by little protruded my bared head and turned my face up to hers. The movement was nothing but a piece of diabolical acting, but the malignity that governed it was real, and must have made my face horrible to look at.

My wife stared at me with eyes wide opened in horror. She reeled towards the chair and sank in it, her hands raised as if to ward off a blow, her face ghastly white, her lips moving, as though she sought to articulate in words the sound that rattled in her throat. I crawled out, and, raising myself upon my feet, stood before her.

By a desperate effort she overcame the terror that had paralyzed her sufficiently to shape a few words, though the sound was scarcely audible.

‘Are you my husband?’ she gasped.

‘Do I look like your husband?’ I asked, bending down, and whispering hoarsely in her face.

Shaking her head wildly, she replied :

‘No, no! You are not Kit!’

I saw the meaning of that frantic gesture and rapid denial. She saw the danger of admitting the possibility in the probability that I should demand to be acknowledged as her husband.

‘*Who* are you?’ she asked, as I made no response, but stood bending over her, glaring in her face. Her very whisper took an accent of fearful apprehension.

‘No matter who I am,’ said I. ‘You are Kit Wyndham’s wife—I know that. And if

you don't want all the world to know it as well, you must get me out of this.'

The prospect of getting rid of me gave her strength and courage.

'Tell me what I can do to help you. What do you want?'

'Food to begin with. Don't you see I am starving?'

'I will get it,' she said, rising, and turning as if to go by the door that opened directly on to the passage.

I put myself in her way, stopping her brusquely.

'Not so quick! Not so quick,' said I.
'We must understand each other before I lose sight of you.'

I drew the clasp knife from my pocket and opened it with a snap. Then I strode towards the adjoining room where her child lay asleep.

She sprang to my side, and clutched my arm with vehement force.

‘What are you going to do there?’ she panted.

‘I am going to wait there till you come back.’

‘I will not trust you.’

‘Nor I you. Now what’s to be done?’

She took her hands from my arm, and clasped her temples with a gesture of distraction.

‘You fool!’ I muttered. ‘I could have cut the child in pieces an hour ago if I wanted to. I didn’t. Do you think I mean to swing for such a thing as you or your child? I am in danger—not you. Your child is safe as long as I am safe. You’ll find it living when you return if you are careful. But mark this: if you raise an alarm, if you allow me to be discovered, I’ll murder the brat. Don’t think it an idle threat. I would rather hang than go back to that infernal prison.’

I made a step forward towards the room.

She threw herself between me and the door, speechless with maternal fear, throwing up her arms as if inviting me to plunge the knife in her own defenceless bosom.

‘Why don’t you scream for help, idiot?’ I whispered, to avert the climax I dreaded.

‘I want to help you—I will help you,’ she said, under her laboured breathing. ‘But you shall not go into that room.’

‘Well, how do you propose to help me? I must be sure there shall be no treachery.’

‘I will give you what you like. I will go downstairs with you. You shall hold my hand all the time, and cut it off if I betray you.’

‘Much good that would do me. I’d rather kill you right out and be hanged for it, if it comes to the worst.’

‘What you will, but not that,’ she said, turning a terrified glance towards her child’s room.

‘Are the servants gone?’

‘Long ago. No one is up. Come!’

She offered her hand eagerly that I might hold it in gage for her fidelity.

‘I can’t go out bareheaded,’ I muttered, going back to the bedside.

She kept to my side. I fell on my hands and knees, and fished out my hat and the basket.

‘You want money,’ she said as I got up. I nodded.

She opened a jewel-box and gave me all it contained—purse, diamonds, trinkets—every-thing.

‘Your watch,’ I said greedily, as I stuffed the things into the pocket of my shrimping coat; ‘the rings off your fingers—all.’

She stripped her wrists, throat, and dress of its ornaments, and then drew the rings from her fingers.

‘I’ll let you keep your wedding-ring for Kit’s sake,’ said I.

We went to the door. She opened it softly and looked out ; then she turned to me, offering her hand boldly.

It was with a strange feeling of repugnance that I took it in mine. The fingers were cold as ice ; it was like a dead hand.

She helped me to stock the basket with food from the larder, and then we went together into the hall. A long ulster with a hood hung against the wall.

‘ I’ll have that,’ said I, taking it down and slinging it over my arm.

My wife unfastened the front door, and held it open for me to pass.

‘ Which is the way ?’ I asked, peering out into the darkness.

‘ The first path to the right leads straight into the road.’

‘ Are you sure it doesn’t lead to the prison I broke away from ?’ I asked in a whisper, grinning in her face.

‘I don’t understand you. What do you mean?’

‘Why, I mean that I’m not a fool to let you slam the door on my back and rouse the house while I’m groping about for the path. No, no. Kit may trust his wife: I don’t. You’ll have to show me the way into the road.’

She hesitated a moment, and then said, almost with dignity, as she stepped into the doorway :

‘I am ready.’

‘My hands are full; close the door,’ said I. She drew the door to.

When we were at some distance from the house, on the carriage drive, I stopped her.

‘Put this ulster on,’ I said.

‘I do not want it,’ she replied, drawing back as I set down the basket and held up the coat.

‘Put it on,’ I muttered angrily; ‘do you

think I am considering whether you want it or not? I'm thinking of myself and the police. I've not escaped them three days to be caught on the fourth. On with it. That light new dress doesn't look well beside my rags at this time of night. It can be seen a quarter of a mile off.'

'What have you to fear? You can see the gate before you. I have twice as far to return to the house.'

'We won't part yet. I must be sure the gate is not locked. Put the hood over your head.'

She did as I directed her. I slung the basket on my back again and trudged on, grasping her wrist.

At the gate she stopped. I lifted the latch and pushed it open with my foot, still holding her tightly by the wrist.

'Come on,' said I; 'the road's clear.'

'I go no further,' she said firmly.

‘ Oh yes, you do—much further,’ said I.
‘ You go with me as far as I go.’

‘ Go with you ! Where to ?’
‘ To find your husband, Kit Wyndham !’
said I. ‘ And we won’t part till he’s found !’

CHAPTER XXIX.

PUT TO THE TORTURE.

THE courage that had sustained my wife through her terrible ordeal gave way at the mention of her husband's name. Trembling convulsively, she clung to the gate for support. I did not need this proof of guilt to aggravate my malignity.

'Come on,' said I, giving her wrist a wrench. She uttered a sharp cry of pain. 'Ah, you understand that, do you?' I continued, dragging her along. 'Have you ever had your arm twisted? I dare say not. Well, I promise you I'll twist it out of its socket if you call out again.'

‘ Oh, let me go !’ she murmured piteously.
‘ I cannot walk—I shall fall !’

‘ Oh, no, you won’t, if you keep bearing in mind that you’ll get your arm screwed round if you do.’

‘ I’ve given you everything you asked for,’ she remonstrated faintly.

‘ So you have, because you couldn’t help it. I’m not finding fault with you on that account. I’ll allow you’ve behaved reasonable and fair, and if I had my own way I’d let you go back, and chance your sending all the household after me. Glad to get rid of you, too. Why, what do I want of you ? It’s a nice thing to have a woman on my hands ! There’s bound to be a search for you, and I’ve got to hide you as well as myself.’

‘ Oh, for pity’s sake, a little slower !’ she faltered, panting for breath.

‘ Anything in reason,’ said I, relaxing my pace. ‘ And, mind, as long as you’re reason-

able, you won't find me a bad sort. Only you'll understand that I won't stand any nonsense, and will be obeyed. Kit shan't say I've spoilt you when I hand you over to him : so if you've got any fine feelings, you had better make up your mind to put them in your pocket, and when I tell you to do a thing you do it sharp, or it will be the worse for you. I don't say I shall hit you, because I hold that no man has got a right to knock a woman about unless she's his wife. You'll get enough of that when Kit comes out. He's not a mild-tempered man like me, and at the least word he'll up with anything he can lay his hand on and strike out. It ain't his fault. You can't expect a man who's been ten or a dozen years in prison for nothing to keep his temper or anything else that's pleasant. And when he's had irons on him day and night for six or seven years, working in 'em, sleeping in 'em, lugging 'em into church with him—

what are you snivelling about now? ain't I walking slow enough ?'

She sobbed, pressing one hand to her side, the other to her eyes. In a grudging tone I bade her sit down on the bank. She sank down, burying her face in her hands.

'I dare say it will be hard on you at first —this sort of life—after being petted and humoured, and having everything done for you by servants. But it's no good crying, because that's all over. You can't say you haven't had a good time of it all these years while your husband has been eating his heart out with sorrow, and then trying to make away with himself, and then trying to forget everyone and live a quiet life, and then giving way to despair, and giving himself up to the devil like, and going all to the bad, till there's not a bit of heart left in him—nothing but a mad thirst to do unto others like they've done unto him. You can't say you haven't been

enjoying yourself all the while, and it's non-sense crying because your innings is over.'

'Let us go to him,' she said struggling to her feet.

We trudged on again, and I continued in the same tone :

'He's told me all about it: how you and the Major put your spoke in his wheel and got him committed for life, when he was in a fair way of getting out if you'd only kept quiet; and I don't wonder he went sort of mad over it. It ain't the sort of thing a man might expect from a woman he did his best to shield—is it? "Only let me get out of this hell for a week," says he, "and I'll put an end to her life and mine!" That was years ago, before he got on to the black book. I don't think he'd kill you now, nor himself neither, till he'd tortured you down to your last breath. He ain't got any hope in the world but of getting hold of you and taking

his revenge, and that hope he never lets go of. Him and me were pals, and we changed promises, like most of the pals in there. And the promise that I made him was that if ever I came across you I would take care of you till he got out, and I mean to keep my promise through thick and thin, because that's another of those things I hold to. It's lucky for you you've fell in my hands, and not his. Do you know what he'd a' done if he'd been in my place ?'

She turned her white face to me in silent inquiry.

' He'd have killed your two children one after the other.'

She stopped short with a sharp cry of horror.

' He would—I'm sure of it, as you stand there—having not a bit of feeling left in him, but all his soul turned to the bad. He's had his heart cut out with the whip.'

‘The whip !’ she gasped faintly.

‘Ah, there’s nothing for turning a man into a brute like that. I dare say he’ll show you the scars on his back, and ask you how you mean to heal what you have brought on him.’

‘Quicker ! quicker !’ she cried, running forward, as if to meet her fate and end her torture at once. She ran but a few yards, and then fell without a sound upon the road.

As I raised her shoulders her head fell back heavily. In the dim light of the stars her face looked like a piece of finely-cut stone. I thought she was dead.

I got the bottle of spirits out of my basket, and brought her back to consciousness.

‘Kit ! Kit !’ she murmured, opening her eyes, and then, with returning consciousness, she looked around with vague eagerness, asking where he was, and what had happened.

‘ You fell down trying to run. Are you hurt ? Is there anything broke ?’

‘ No, no,’ she answered hurriedly, as she rose to her feet ; ‘ let us go on.’

I had not spoken continuously as I have written. I said much more than I have repeated. We were by this time well on the moor.

There was not a cloud in the sky ; the path was as clear to me in the twilight of this midsummer night as though it had been broad day. One by one we passed the stones I had fixed in my mind, as landmarks, in the night journeys made across the moor. My wife’s endurance surprised me. It was rather for my own relief than hers that I at length made her sit down. She would neither eat nor drink, but sat scanning the horizon all round, as though she expected to see her husband coming to meet us. Was it dread, or what ? I could not make her out.

‘Where are we going? do you know the way surely?’ she asked.

‘Oh, I know it well enough; we’re going to the Refuge.’

‘The Refuge?’

‘That’s the name of it. It’s known to all the old hands. We’ve got a little Prisoners’ Aid Society of our own, and this hut the old ‘uns keep up for the use of any poor pal who can get away from Dartmoor. There’s pretty nearly everything he’s likely to want——’

‘I am ready to go on. I am quite strong again.’

‘Wait a bit. It’s a long while since I had a tuck out like this.’

She rose and looked all round.

‘You don’t see anyone, I suppose?’ said I, between two mouthfuls.

‘No; I can’t see the house. How long has he been there?’

‘He mayn’t be there at all. How should

I know? It's a year since I saw him. He was safe enough in his irons then.'

She sank down on the stone, her white face turned to me.

'We were working together then in the quarries. His head was full of plans to get away, and revenge. The day before I was drafted off to Portland we changed our promises. I didn't expect I should ever have to keep mine. But, you see, I got away through a Torquay fisherman, who took me off in his boat, and gave me this old suit of things to cover my prison togs. Then, seeing a policeman had his eye on me, I sneaked up a kind of a lane, and got into your house while the servants were in the garden. And there, as I lay under the bed, I heard the maids talking and your name mentioned; but I should never have guessed you was Kit's wife if you hadn't let out the secret the moment you saw me. That was a lucky

thing for me—and Kit, too, if he should turn up. Maybe he won't turn up this long while; but we've got a bit of stuff to turn into cash, and can wait pretty comfortable for ever so long. I ain't a man to go from my promise —especially when it suits me.'

She sat in silence for some time while I continued to eat.

'Is he like you?' she asked at length, in a low tone.

'Like me! Well, that's a good 'un! You must have a funny sort of memory! Why, he's ten years younger than me. And what with his nose being broke and a tooth or two gone, and his fat chops, he looks more like a prizefighter than anything else. Like me! I hope not. Why, anyone can see I'm a watchmaker by my long fingers and my sunk eyes. Besides, I've been a good-conduct man, and he's been six years on the black book. That makes all the difference. I was

only in for seven years, over a forgery job, and so I'd got something to hope for, and with that, when a man thinks about the future, and does a bit of reading every night, he can keep his looks. But that poor beggar —he had nothing to hope for, and giving himself up to his temper, knowing there was nothing to be got by behaving decently, and getting punished and punished every day, and flogged worse than any brute beast——'

'Oh, let me see if he is there!' she cried, springing up again.

'Ah, you think he's the same soft, gullible fellow he was long ago!' said I, picking up the basket leisurely. 'You think you are going to get round him as you did then—hey? He must have been a soft fool at that time; he isn't now, I tell you. He's as hard as that rock, and you might just as well try to soften that with your blarney as him. That's not the way,' I added, as she

made a step or two forward. ‘ You’ll have to follow at my heels, same as you’ll have to creep behind Kit by-and-by.’

She drew herself up and stood irresolute a moment ; then, as I shook the basket into position on my shoulders and struck out to the left, her pride gave way, and with bowed head she followed in my steps. I chuckled.

For some time I plodded on in silence. Now and then I heard a stifled sob behind me ; that was music to my ear.

‘ She is thinking of those she has left behind,’ thought I ; ‘ of all she has lost for ever.’ But I kept my thoughts to myself, not to lose a sound of her woe, or turn her reflections into another channel. And so I trudged on steadily over the desolate moor two or three miles further, when, hearing no sound for some minutes, I turned round and found I was ahead of her by about a dozen yards.

I thought she meditated some plan of giving me the slip, and called angrily to her to come on; but her tottering steps, as she drew near, showed that physical exhaustion was the cause of her not keeping up with me.

She sank down on the turf and sat motionless. I listened in vain for a sound of pain. She had ceased to cry. She might have sunk into sleep from exhaustion. I woke her up.

‘We haven’t got above four miles more to go,’ said I. ‘So we may as well settle now what we’re going to say to Kit if we find him there.’

‘What do you mean?’ she asked vaguely, raising her bowed head.

‘Why, what story are we going to tell him? I don’t suppose anything can make him much worse than he is; still, there’s no knowing. I don’t want to make it harder for

you than what it's likely to be ; and, still more, I don't want him to do for you before I'm clear out of it. Now, he don't know anything about these children of yours, and he'd better not hear about 'em just at first. He'll expect me to give him some account of how I found you, and we may as well stick to one story, in case he questions us separately. Now, what are we to say about the Major and those youngsters ?'

' You may say whatever you please,' she said, facing me and speaking with great clearness and firmness, despite her condition. ' I shall give an account of all I have done, of every fault—of my crime—to my husband ;' she paused, and added with stronger emphasis, '*but not to you.*'

' Well, as you like,' said I impatiently ; ' I've done my best for you. But, still, it won't do to come that tone with Kit. You've no call to stand on your dignity ; and he

won't stand any nonsense of that sort. He'll break that down pretty quick.'

It was gray morning when we reached the cottage—I myself fagged out; my wife only supported by mental tension.

'Now for it!' said I, thumping the door.

In the silence that followed I looked at my wife. I was close to her, the gray light from the east fell full upon her face. I was astonished at the change I saw there: she was old, too!

Had the artificial light in which I had previously seen her disguised the effect of time, or had the terrors of the night suddenly aged her? The features were the same, but drawn and pinched and hollowed, and as void of colour as the ashy clouds above.

Some feeling of regret I had, assuredly. It was not for her lost beauty, but rather that there was so little left to crush.

I knocked again and pushed the door open. The room was as I left it.

'Stay there,' said I, after pretending to explore the room. 'There's a ladder; I'll see if he's upstairs.'

I left her standing by the open door; she was there when I came down, her hand against the jamb.

'Kit Wyndham!' I called out.

As the echo of my voice died away, my wife, without a sound, sank down, and fell forward on the threshold with her arms outspread.

CHAPTER XXX.

I TRY TO BREAK MY WIFE'S SPIRIT.

I LIFTED the inanimate woman on to my shoulder and carried her into the room above. There I laid her upon the bed. As soon as consciousness began to return, I drew the blind over the skylight and went down, drawing the trapdoor over my head and shooting the bolt. Then I crawled up the ladder into the loft over the stable, threw myself down on the hay, and, too exhausted even to think, fell asleep at once.

My first thought when I awoke was for the safety of my prisoner. Mingled with the exultation of having at last got her into my possession was the fear that she had escaped.

It was almost too much to believe that my good fortune should continue.

I hurried into the house. The trap was closed, the bolt fast. I stole up the ladder, and, lifting the trap, peered into the room. My wife was still there where I had left her. She had thrown off the ulster. Her hair was tumbled, the beautiful tresses falling over the edge of the pillow; but she was sleeping calmly now. There was a faint flush upon her cheek. She breathed regularly. I stood over her for some minutes with a savage joy in my heart, and then I withdrew as noiselessly as I had approached.

The sun was high in the heavens. I reckoned it must be nearly mid-day. There was no time to lose. After giving the pony a good feed, I went down to the stream and bathed myself in a pool. Then I put on my suit of black, stowed away my costumes and my wife's jewellery under a big stone behind

the stable, and, going into the lower room, shaved off all the stubble from my face. That made another change in my looks—a little for the better. Making sure that the bolt was fast in the trapdoor, and drawing away the ladder as a further precaution, I put some victuals in my pocket, paused a moment to listen if my wife were moving, and, assured that she was still sleeping and likely to sleep for some time longer, I went out, locked the door carefully, saddled the pony, and started off for Newton. There I put up the pony at an inn and got in the next train for Exeter.

At Exeter I wrote and sent the following telegram to Major Cleveden at the Hermitage :

‘When you receive this I shall be beyond recovery. Forgive me, and forget me.

‘H.’

This done, I returned to the hut as I had come, taking with me a few things bought at Newton.

Hebe was pacing up and down in her room. I heard her step as I entered the house.

‘Who is there?’ she called, as I took down the shutters to let in light.

I put the ladder in position, and, opening the trap, showed myself.

It was growing dark, and I stood in shadow. She started forward, and, after looking eagerly in my face, said, with an accent of disgust:

‘You?’

I told her I had been to Newton to beautify myself—passing my hand over my lantern jaws with a grin—and buy food for our wants. I was proceeding to tell her how I had also been spending some of her money on a pony, when she interrupted me.

‘Have you seen him?’ she asked.

‘No such luck, or I shouldn’t have come back here—lay your life. I only hope we shan’t have to wait years before he breaks away.’

‘He *has* been here,’ she said, pointing to the sketches on the wall eagerly.

I went up and pretended to examine the drawings.

‘Ah, he was good at this sort of thing; but I don’t see any death’s heads, or hangings, or murders—that’s what he was so good at.’

‘That was in prison—when he was suffering. He may—he must have changed,’ she said, with hopeful conviction.

‘That he must to have come down to such spiritless stuff as this.’

‘Do you think it impossible that a nature hardened by one condition may not be softened by another?’ she asked with scorn.

‘Never!’ said I, with all the emphasis of

my own obdurate feelings. ‘No more than the dead can be brought back to life.’

Looking sidelong at her, I saw on her face, as she regarded the sketch before her, an expression that puzzled me — a strange mingling of contempt and sweetness.

‘The contempt is for my opinion,’ thought I; ‘she believes that her husband is still soft enough to be wheedled, and she is rehearsing in her mind the sweet cajolery with which to fool him.’

‘That won’t satisfy my hunger,’ said I, roughly turning away. ‘I’m going to see about putting up my pony. You come down and look after the tea.’

When I returned from the stable I found her standing by the door with the ulster on her arm.

‘Do you call this getting tea?’ I asked.

‘I do not propose to get tea—here,’ she replied, meeting my scowl with her calm,

dark eyes, and with no sign of fear on her face. ‘I wish to know which way I am to return to Torquay.’

‘Ah, you think of going away already !’ said I, with a sneer, planting myself before her and folding my arms.

‘I intend to go at once,’ she replied.

‘That’s a good ’un. What do you think I brought you here for ?’

‘To find my husband. He is gone, and I must look for him elsewhere.’

‘At Torquay ?’ said I derisively.

‘Yes, at Torquay. My address is known to his friends, and it is there he will seek me.’

‘You think he’s fool enough to trust you again, and be handed over to complete his term of imprisonment !’

‘You know why I am going ; tell me how to go.’

‘Suppose I don’t choose to tell you.’

‘Then I will find my way without.’

As she spoke her eyes wandered quickly round the moor for some guiding sign. In another minute she would have fled. I barred the door with my arm.

‘Don’t be a fool!’ said I. ‘Listen to me. The moor stretches away, pathless, as you see it, for ten miles on every side. How far do you think you could go before you dropped from exhaustion? Look at your hand: it shakes like a leaf from last night’s fatigue, or want of food, or fear.’

‘If I am weak, it is not with fear of you,’ she retorted, her lip curving with contempt. ‘Be assured of that. Not all your brutal strength could have forced me to come here against my will. Nor all your brutal threats have kept me from following you to find my husband.’

‘Must I reveal myself to make her believe that I am changed?’ I asked myself. ‘Must

she know that I am her husband to see that she has no longer an unformed youth to play with and to bend to her purpose ?'

As I stood scanning her face in silence, at a loss how to deal with a nature too fine for coarse methods, and with a hatred in my heart that I could not express, I became aware that she was more beautiful than ever she had seemed before to my eyes.

But had my eyes deceived me when I saw her from the garden and thought her unchanged ? Had they deceived me again when I stood over her in the early morning and thought she had lost beauty and youth ? Did they deceive me now ? Assuredly her face had lost its youthful roundness, but the features had gained in character and delicacy by that loss. There was that difference in it which a head gains by the finishing touch of a master hand, and no more.

‘ She is beautiful ! ’ I said to myself, with a

sensation to which I had long been a stranger. There was little enough in the prison to expand one's artistic faculty ; but outside there were always the clouds, with their ever-changing aspect of colour and form, to feed and keep alive the sense of beauty ; and the sense, though dulled by debasing associations and ignoble aspirations, yet retained latent its power of perception.

It was my wife's face that stirred it now into activity. It was a purely intellectual feeling, but for that reason the beauty must have been the more striking to excite my admiration at the same time that my mind was prejudiced by personal repugnance.

'There's one thing I can do with my brute force,' said I ; 'I can keep you here, and I will, no matter how long we have to wait for Kit's coming. I'll keep my word, because it suits me. Ten years—twenty years—it's all the same to me. I like the place. I don't

want to go back to the old life. We've got enough to live independent all our lifetime here. I'm not afraid of being found—a man bolting from Portland ain't likely to be looked for at Dartmoor. Here we are, and here we stay—understand that! If Kit is looking for you, he'll come here when he finds you are gone away from your home and the Major and your children. He'll know I've got you, and will keep you safe. You can be comfortable or uncomfortable, just as you choose to make it. While you behave yourself, I shall give you liberty within certain limits. You can have the run of the house and take exercise outside, always providing I'm about to keep an eye on you. But if I catch you trying to run away, I shall lock you up in your room, and you won't stir out of it till I feel I can trust you not to repeat the experiment. And these precautions I am taking for your own good as well as for Kit's sake and my own safety, for

you never could find your way across that moor. You would break your neck among the rocks, drown yourself in a bog, or die of starvation on the tors. Now I've warned you, I will give you permission to try what you can do at getting away. There you are — I lowered my arm and stood back from the door — ‘the moor lies before you ; try and cross it. Go on. Don't be afraid. I'll keep you in sight, and when I see you can go no further, I'll lend you a hand to crawl back.’

She realized the utter hopelessness of the attempt, and foresaw the humiliating consequence of failure, but her spirit was unbroken. She kept her eyes fixed upon my face with an expression in which there was pity as well as loathing.

‘ You miserable creature,’ her eyes seemed to say, ‘ what a loveless life you must have lived to be brought down to such a condition as this !’

‘ You’d rather not, eh ?’ said I. ‘ Oh, you’ll be reasonable enough when you get the better of your temper. It’s no good making things worse than they are, especially when you can make them better.’ I passed her with a savage laugh, and began to unpack the things on the table I had brought from Newton. ‘ You’d better tuck up that lace dress of yours ; it’s torn already. I shall have to buy some stuff for a working-dress and aprons next time I go to Tavistock.’

She made no response, but stood where I had left her by the door, looking over the moor.

‘ Come on,’ I called out ; ‘ if you’re not hungry, I am. Do you know how to make a fire with peat, for that’s all the fuel I can find ? If you don’t, you’ll have to find out. There’s some down there by the stove, and some sticks and shavings to light it with. Here’s a box of matches, and here’s a packet of tea. Oh,

we must have water. I'll go and get a canful from the stream. Are you going to light the fire ?'

'No,' said she, turning round to face me.

'Well, you can fetch the water while I light it ; but you'll have to do one or the other if you want any tea.'

'I shall do neither,' she said. 'If my husband told you to take care of me, he did not permit you to make me your servant.'

'Nor I didn't promise him to be yours, either. As you like,' I growled, banging a loaf down on the table ; 'if you don't want tea, you can go without it. Bread and water's good enough for me ; I'm used to it.'

I took up the can and went down to the stream for water. When I came back Hebe was no longer at the door. But I heard her in her room. She had closed the door, and was trying to secure it.

CHAPTER XXXI.

MY WIFE HARD TO BEAT.

My wife had not touched the bread I laid on the table. She had eaten nothing now for nearly four-and-twenty hours. That did not disquiet me. I had known prisoners who tried to starve themselves in order to get on the sick-list, but their resolution invariably gave way before the pangs of hunger had injured their health, and I reasoned that a woman could not succeed where a dogged convict fails.

‘She is preparing another mortification for herself,’ thought I. ‘It will all help to break her spirit.’

After bolting the trap and taking away the

steps, I went up to the loft and fell asleep in the hay, fairly well contented with the day's events.

' You can come down,' I called, when I had set up the steps and unbolted the trap the next morning.

Then I lit the fire, made a cup of coffee, and cooked a rasher of bacon for myself. After that I raked out the fire, that Hebe might have to light it again for her own use. But I might have saved myself that trouble. She did not come down.

When I had finished my breakfast I called to her. She made no response. I had heard no movement overhead, and felt uneasy. Going up the steps, I put my shoulders against the trap, and opened it easily enough. She had thought to secure it by wedging an old nail in the opening. My wife was seated at the other end of her room in a state of dejection. She rose hastily and stood in an

attitude that was almost defiant as I thrust my head above the floor.

‘Do you want me to bring your food up to you?’ I asked savagely.

‘Leave me—that is the only favour I have to ask of you,’ she answered.

‘That’s easily granted. I shan’t have much trouble with you if that’s all you want.’

I picked up the nail I had forced out, and, looking at it with a laugh, went downstairs. In the bag of tools there was an old bolt. I took it up with the necessary tools and a few screws, and fastened it on the upper side of the trap where the other had been.

‘There,’ said I, when the job was finished; ‘now you can lock yourself in if you like.’

I expected fully she would come down in a few minutes; but after waiting an hour, meditating what I might say to humiliate her upon her defeat, I grew weary of inaction.

‘She will beat me at this game,’ said I; ‘she’s used to doing nothing: I’m not.’ So I looked about for occupation. Accustomed to the order and neatness of a prison, the state of the room displeased me.

‘Rule Twenty-three,’ said I to myself: ‘“Prisoners shall keep their cells, utensils, clothing, and bedding clean and neatly arranged, and shall clean and sweep the yards, passages, and other parts of the prison as may be directed, unless provision for the performance of these duties is otherwise made.”’ As provision don’t look like being otherwise made to-day, I must do it myself.’

Pleased with the notion of doing something, I set to work with a will—sweeping, brushing, polishing, and setting everything in order with something of the satisfaction I had found in the old ‘good-conduct’ days when I made my cell a model for the warders to show to visitors inspecting the prison. Nevertheless,

it irritated me to remember that I had resolved to force my wife to perform the offices I was now doing myself. I consoled myself for this disappointment by reflecting that she could not hold out much longer, and that my triumph would be all the greater when she did yield to my directions. To show her that I was not in the least alarmed by her voluntary starving, I made an effort to sing, but, breaking down in that by reason of my disused voice being as tuneless as a crow's, I had recourse to whistling. Even this, however, was a failure, and degenerated into the hissing noise with which grooms rub down horses.

By about three o'clock there was nothing more to be done. Everything was in its place as neat and clean as hands could make it.

I had not heard or seen a sign of Hebe all the morning. When I knocked off at mid-

day to fry myself a rasher of bacon, I called her without getting any response. Her prolonged obstinacy exasperated me; her endurance perplexed me. I had never heard of a convict holding out longer than forty hours against the temptation to eat, and I was too dull to perceive that a refined woman has infinitely greater fortitude in supporting physical suffering than a brutalized man.

I went again up into her room. She had not troubled herself to secure the bolt. The place was like a stove, for the sun had been shining down upon the slates, and the skylight was closed. Hebe lay upon the bed: she did not move as I put back the trap noisily. The fear that she was dead dismayed me, and I drew near the bedside with a foreboding inexplicable to me then. Why, without a spark of tender feeling, did I dread losing her? The only explanation I can find is that in losing her I must lose the sweets of a

revenge that had formed my only hope for six years.

She lay with her face to the wall, her head bent back, her cheek pillow'd upon a tumbled mass of dark, soft hair that threw up in relief the delicate line of her white throat and chin, her parted lips, and white teeth. Her cheek was flushed, her bosom rose and fell to a regular respiration, and her eyes were closed. Her tranquillity was a fresh aggravation when I found I had nothing to fear from it.

‘ You’re a clever woman,’ I said aloud, as I bent over her. ‘ Kit told me all about you, and I didn’t stand in need of this proof. But you’re not clever enough to deceive me as you deceived him with your acting. I’m not such a soft muff as he was. Oh, you’re not asleep! You’d have bolted the trap before lying down if your only motive for it was to get a doze. But it wasn’t. You knew I should come up, and you left the trap open that I might come

in and see you with your head in a pretty pose, and your hair artfully arranged to show your face at its best. You thought that if you had made a fool of one man you could make a fool of another. But, you see, I'm not a greenhorn of twenty, and your beauty makes no more impression on my senses than if they were all dead. I'm not to be led by the nose. A fine flat Kit must have been not to see through you! Perhaps he'd believe in you now—think it was innocent simplicity that made you prefer to lie all day in an oven like this when you were free to get fresh air. I know your motive. You're trying to make yourself ill. You expect to frighten me into fetching a doctor, through whom you could communicate with that old rascal the Major, and get a release. But I'm not to be frightened. You're not ill, and I'll take care you shan't make yourself ill !'

With that I pushed up the skylight and

secured it, to let a current of air pass through.

‘ You’ll know how to shut it at night when you feel chilly and the trap’s bolted,’ I said, going back to the bedside.

Her eyes were still closed, her features unmoved. I had made noise enough to awake any ordinary sleeper ; her immobility changed suspicion to conviction. She was shamming.

‘ You have made up your mind to get away from me where Kit may find you,’ said I, speaking still louder. ‘ I’ve made up my mind you shall stay here till I find him. We shall see who wins.’

The foreboding that I must lose in a struggle with her indomitable spirit enraged me. Her unmoved face seemed to mock me with its placid calm. I doubted the advantage to myself of the passive policy we had both adopted. Hers was moral strength ; mine

purely physical. I was half minded to shake her out of her pretended sleep, and force her to go down below. But that in itself was a tacit admission of defeat in one direction that I could not reconcile myself to. And, after all, if her will were more inflexible than mine, how could I force her further than that? She might compel me to restore her to her friends, or seek medical help, which would result in the same thing, by persisting in starving herself into a dangerous condition, and that within a few days.

As I turned away from her side in savage impatience, I caught sight of an empty glass upon the table; beside it stood the water-pitcher: that was nearly empty. She had not been able to overcome the cravings of thirst. I saw at once the power this discovery gave me.

‘We shall see who wins,’ I repeated, with savage exultation.

I took the pitcher away with me, dropping the trap with a bang that shook the floor, and bolting it underneath.

I saddled the pony as if my life depended on expedition, and rode over the moor to a small farm on the outskirts of Newton. A man stood in the rick-yard. He came slowly towards me when I hailed him.

‘Have you got a cow to sell?’ I asked.

He shook his head slowly. That did not discourage me. A careful dealer is never in a hurry to sell.

‘There are cows in the meadow over there: don’t they belong to you?’

‘Yes, they do.’

‘Well, can’t you let me have one—I don’t mind what I pay?’

‘What are you? You ain’t a farmer, I know; and you don’t look like a butcher.’

‘I’m a gentleman’s servant,’ said I, an assertion which my shaven face might, I

thought, bear out. ‘The young missus is down here for her lungs, and the doctor’s ordered her to have pure milk. The governor seems to think she’s going to be cured the moment she gets it. That’s why he’s sent me off with orders to be back again in a couple of hours. If you can’t let me have one I won’t waste your time or my own, master.’

I gave my pony a nudge with my heel.

‘Hold hard. If it’s to oblige some of the gentry at Newton as I hear are in a bad way,’ he said (I nodded acquiescence), ‘why, I dare say I could part with one, but they are that good it grieves me sore to let ere a one go, it do.’

He turned down towards the meadow, with another shake of the head, and I followed. The cattle came towards him when he called.

‘There they are, and as it’s getting on towards milking-time you can see for yourself

that, "choose as you may, you can't go astray," as the saying is.'

I chose one which, of course, happened to be the very 'flower of the flock' and the most hard to part with; but eventually, a price being named, I counted out the money, and going off with my purchase, left the farmer better pleased than I found him.

The sun was setting when I reached the cottage after the tedious return journey. I milked the cow, and, filling the pitcher, carried it up to my wife's room. She was seated beside the bed, but her head rested on the pillow. She rose as I came up.

'There's something to drink,' said I, putting the pitcher on the table.

She stepped forward eagerly as I turned away. When I looked back from the steps she was taking the half-emptied glass from her lips.

The light was beyond her; she stood out

in silhouette, with the glass in her hand, motionless and silent. It seemed to me she had just discovered that what she had drunk so eagerly was not water, and that she was doubtful whether I had not substituted poison.

I was content to leave her in that terrible uncertainty for the night.

CHAPTER XXXII.

I BETRAY MYSELF.

To house the cow I had to turn the pony loose in the walled enclosure intended for a garden. This reminded me that I must enlarge the stable to shelter both animals when the rough weather set in. So when I had finished my supper, cleared away the things, and lit the lamp, I turned back the table-cover to make a drawing of the alteration to be made. That was an affair of five minutes, but long after it was done I still hung over the table idly tracing the outline of a stain on the white wood.

My thoughts ran continually on the woman upstairs. Her dark figure standing out

against the light, as I had seen her last, haunted me. What was she doing up there in the dark? What visions did she see in the darkness? What voices came to her from the silence? Was she trembling with fear of the husband who should call her to account—weeping for the children she should never take into her arms again? In some form she must be suffering. For the first time that reflection failed to give me delight.

Presently I found a resemblance to her face in the outline of the stain I had traced. The pencil-mark was indistinct on the dark polish. Beside me lay the penknife with which I had sharpened the pencil. I took it up, and almost as idly as I had begun I continued the sketch. It was apple-wood, varnished to look like mahogany. The lines cut with the knife showed up clearly, and the likeness became more evident. Gradually my interest grew in the work, developing at length into an

artistic ardour that impelled me further and further. I cut deep into the wood, bringing the outline into relief; got light and shadow into the face, and gave softness to the hair by a trick that I once thought was my own. I tried to reproduce the profile as I had seen it in the afternoon; the eyes closed, the lips parted, the head thrown back, giving an unbroken line from the chin to the spring of the throat. I wished it to be faithful to her beauty, that in the end I might have the savage gratification of burning it out with a hot iron. ‘If I rub paraffin into the wood and set light to it,’ thought I, ‘I shall see the beauty eaten away as if vitriol had been thrown into her living face.’

But as I worked on, this malignant feeling gave place to one of aching sorrow as I recalled to mind the old days when I first attempted to carve a likeness of the beloved face; how I dreamed night after night of the

work I had laid aside with regret when the light failed ; with what feverish eagerness I returned to it when the slow sun rose ; with what reverent love I strove to give the touch that should express the ineffable sweetness and purity I found in her features.

When I got to that stage at which an artist doubts whether he is doing good work or bad, I left off. My hand was wet and trembling. It was so long since I had used it to such work, and I had sat over the thing too long. Sick and giddy, I went to the open door for air.

‘ What shall I do with it ? ’ I asked myself, going back to the table. I felt a certain affection for the work in itself : it was good. I no longer thought of defacing it ; that was a brutality against which the awakened sensibility of an artist revolted. It was a bit of wood-carving—nothing more. There was no sentiment in it as it was ; there might be if

I disfigured it. I swept the chips off and put them in the stove; then I turned back the cover as I had found it.

On examining the stable in the morning I found that I could make room for the cow by removing the partition at the end and taking in a piece of the shed beyond. The job was three parts done, and I was nailing up the crossbars in their new position, when the light from the door being blocked out, I turned and saw Hebe standing there.

‘Oh, you’ve come down at last,’ said I; adding, after I had driven home a nail: ‘Going to try another game to-day?’

‘I want to speak to you,’ she said quietly, ignoring my sneer.

‘You can come in. You are only stopping out the light there.’

She came in after a moment’s conflict with her pride, and stood resting her hand on the corn-bin.

‘ Well, what is it ? ’ I asked, picking up a board and putting it in its place.

‘ I will wait till you can give me your attention.’

‘ I can listen to you without wasting time. You can talk till I begin hammering, and go on again when I stop. If I don’t stop, you may take it as a sign that I don’t want to hear any more.’

She did not accept this invitation at once. I nailed the plank top and bottom without getting a word. Suddenly, as I stuck some nails I had selected for the next plank in my mouth, a suspicion seemed to strike her.

‘ I thought you were a watchmaker,’ she said.

‘ So I was, but I learnt carpentry at Dartmoor. Preferred going into a workshop to doing the work of a horse in the quarries : that’s where I met Kit.’

‘ You can’t carve wood ? ’

‘ With a saw I can,’ said I, after nailing

the plank which gave me time to think of the evasion.

‘But not as my husband did?’

I shook my head as I dragged out a fresh plank and set it up. There was another interval of silence. When I turned to select more nails, I said :

‘Is that all you’ve got to say?’

She raised her head quickly, as if to change the current of her thoughts. I drove in three nails with a pretence of whistling.

‘When did you last see my husband?’ she asked.

‘I was drafted to Portland May twelve-month, and I see Kit the day before I went.’

‘When did you first come to know him?’

‘In ’82, when I was put in the carpenters’ workshop.’

‘And when you last saw him was he thinking of escape?’

‘Why, he was always thinking of it;

always trying some game to escape, being caught, and put in punishment for it. Most all the old hands go mad about something : that was his madness.'

' You knew him six years : did he alter much in that time ?'

' Well, that is a silly question ! Do you think there'd be a trace of goodness left in you after being treated all that time like a beast.'

' I am only a woman ; he is a man !'

' Don't see much choice betwixt the two. Any way, all the goodness, and manhood too, was knocked out of Kit.'

There was a contemptuous smile on her face as she met my eyes and shook her head.

' You're like that fellow who went to sleep ever so many years and couldn't understand the change that had taken place when he woke,' said I. ' But you'll have to under-

stand it. You won't find Kit pretty, nor pleasant, nor pliable, neither ; make up your mind to that. He ain't what he was when I first knew him.'

' No, no,' she said mournfully. Then in an instant, plucking up spirit, she added : ' But happily he is not what he was when you last knew him.'

I did not understand her, and being no nearer a conclusion after nailing a plank top and bottom, I changed the subject.

' Was the cow in the garden when you came through ?'

' Yes. You got that for me ?'

I grunted, and hammered afresh.

' It was good of you to think of that,' she said when I stopped. ' I could not eat : I must have died. It *was* good of you !' she repeated, as if to convince herself that I was not altogether a villain.

' I promised Kit I'd look after you, didn't

I? Besides, I bought it with your own money.'

Pulling out a new plank, I lost her response.

'How long have you been up?' I asked.

'A long while.'

'What have you been at?'

'I have been down to the stream for water. You are not afraid of my running away now?'

'I said I'd look after you, but I didn't promise to watch you night and day. You know pretty well what the consequences would be if you tried to cross the moor. You can try if you like, but——'

'I don't intend to try. I believe you were right in your conclusions, though you put them in such a form that I could not at first reconcile myself to accept them. But I have since thought a great deal about my position and what course I ought to take, and now I see that there is no sacrifice of self-

respect in accepting even your guidance when it is reasonable.'

' Well, you haven't misspent your time, anyhow.'

Her chin was on her breast, and she seemed absorbed in meditation when I looked at her again.

' Have you had a look round the place ?' I asked.

' I have been looking everywhere,' she answered quietly.

' What for ?'

' My husband.'

The reply startled me. I waited, my finger on the nail, the hammer half raised, for an explanation. Her attitude was unchanged.

' I wanted to make sure whether he had been here or not,' she said.

' I thought you had settled that by the pictures on the wall.'

‘I believed they were his at first, but not when I had examined them all.’

‘Why?’

‘Because there is no sign in them that he had thought of me.’

‘That’s a good ‘un,’ said I, with a hoarse laugh. ‘Did you expect to find a flattering portrait?’

‘No, I looked for what you led me to expect. You told me of the horrible subjects he chose in prison. I expected to see myself being strangled by him: anything——’ she spoke with vehemence and broke off abruptly, covering her face with her hands.

‘You expected to see your destiny revealed as a picture of merit rewarded, eh?’ I muttered, driving in the nail with a single blow. I turned to look at her. Her fingers still trembled before her eyes.

‘It didn’t strike you that he might choose

to forget you and think of a more pleasant subject.'

'Oh, he could not forget me. No man could forget——' she paused.

'Such injuries as he owes to you,' I suggested.

'You have proved that he did not forget me. Oh, I know what must have been in his mind when he tried again and again to escape. I could not hope that he had forgiven me, that he could pity me, that his love could outlive all, and I wronged him in that.'

'I doubt it.'

'I am sure!' she said firmly, dropping her hand and raising her head proudly.

'Wait till you see him.'

'I will wait cheerfully.'

'Ah, you may have to wait long enough; for, according to your own showing, there's no proof that he's out of prison yet.'

‘But there is proof. I know he has escaped: that is what I came to tell you.’

I looked at her in perplexity.

‘Come with me, and I will show you what I have found,’ she said, going towards the door.

I threw down the hammer and followed her, not yet perceiving what had happened.

She crossed the enclosure and entered the house.

‘There!’ she exclaimed triumphantly, pointing to the table.

The cover was thrown back, revealing the work I had done over-night and forgotten in the occupation of the last three hours.

‘It is my face,’ she said, as I went round and looked at it with feigned curiosity. ‘Not as you see it now, but as he saw it years and years ago.’

An artist often fails to see the fault that is obvious to the first critic; and now I saw

what it was in my work that had displeased me when I glanced at it before sitting down to breakfast. Unconsciously I had reproduced in the character of the face the work I had done in my workshop in the old days —guided, maybe, by the subtle influence of the memories that recurred to me in doing it.

‘No hand but his could have done that,’ she continued, her voice trembling with excitement. ‘And I have reason to think of him as he was—a man, generous and tender: since that shows that he still thinks of me as I was to him in those days.’

I could have undeceived her on this point, but not without betraying myself.

‘Well, it looks as if you were right in one thing, any way,’ said I; ‘Kit’s out.’

A smile crept over her face, making it young again.

'And maybe he's gone soft, that's true,' I continued. 'P'raps he fell sick.'

The smile passed in an instant from her lips.

'I wonder if sickness could make you generous.' she said, bending her brows. 'I wonder,' she added, with growing disdain and spirit—'I wonder if anything on earth could make you like my husband.'

'Not if he's the fool you take him for,' I answered.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

LIFE IN A DESERT.

‘HE’s spoilt the table, anyhow,’ said I, in a tone of discontent ; ‘however, I can manage to plane it down, I dare say.’

‘No, no,’ said my wife hastily. ‘Oh, please don’t ! The table in my room is just as large ; let me have this.’

‘Oh, well, if you’re so fond of your portrait as all that, I’m not unreasonable.’

‘Nor I, either. I have made up my mind to do all that I can.’

‘Very well, then ; you’d better see about getting dinner. I’m hungry.’

Saying this, I let down the flaps of the table and carried it upstairs. Her bed was

made, the room neatly arranged. These signs of submission pleased me. I took down her table on my head, and carried in my hand the pitcher still three parts full of milk.

‘ You managed to open your skylight this morning,’ said I.

‘ Yes. I could not lift it yesterday. Oh, I am much stronger this morning.’

As she spoke she tried in vain with both hands to break a stick from the faggot that I could have managed easily with a couple of fingers.

‘ What are you trying to do there?’ I asked.

‘ I am going to light the fire to cook something for your lunch.’

‘ Drop it,’ said I, remembering that I had put the chips from the table in the stove.

‘ You lay the table; that’s more in your line. You’ll find the things in the cupboard.’

‘I don’t see any tablecloth,’ she said timidly.

‘We can do without it.’

‘Without a tablecloth !’

Her surprise at the idea of doing without this luxury was only greater than mine in employing it, after having taken something like twelve thousand meals without.

‘There are some in the drawers upstairs,’ she added.

‘Well, you can fetch one if you hanker after such niceties. You won’t be so particular when you’ve roughed it a bit.’

I had the fire alight and the pan on when she came down.

‘How many rashers can you eat?’ I asked, after fetching the bacon and cutting half a dozen for myself.

‘Oh, I can’t eat bacon !’ she said, looking at it with a little grimace of disgust.

‘Can’t eat bacon !’ I exclaimed, in unfeigned

astonishment, for it still seemed to me the most delicious fare.

‘No; you must not think me stupid. I have been ill. My digestion is bad—for two months I have taken nothing but milk and light food. A little bread with the milk—there is still a good deal in the jug—is all that I want.’

I remembered what Mr. Northcote had told me about my wife’s weak health.

I took the pitcher out, emptied it, washed it in the spring, and refilled it with the new milk of the morning.

‘Up to now,’ I reflected, ‘I’ve done all the work.’

But my equanimity was restored on returning to find that my wife had taken the bacon from the pan and set it on a clean dish. I was about to sit down to table without washing my hands, but the look of the white table-cloth and my wife shamed me, and, glancing

at my grimy fingers, I made another grudging journey to the stream and washed them. Also when I re-entered the cottage I took off my hat.

We must have presented a strange contrast as we sat opposite each other at the table—my wife elegantly dressed, her figure and face the personification of delicate grace and refinement, and I with my close-cropped head and brutal face, looking like nothing better than a recently-shaved convict.

‘ You have not told me your name yet,’ said Hebe.

‘ Gregory !’ said I, with my mouth full. ‘ Here, you’ll spill that ; let me pour it out.’

I took the pitcher which she had tried to lift and filled her glass, grumbling to myself that I was playing the part of her servant rather than that of a master.

‘ Thank you. Why did you fill up the jug ? There was more than enough.’

‘This is fresh milk; I threw the other away. Nothing else to do with it,’ I explained, that she might not think I had sacrificed it on her account; ‘there’s more than we can use.’

‘If we let it stand, Gregory, and skim off the cream, we could make our own butter. I think I could do that. You scald the cream and whip it with your hand. I have seen it done. Shall I try?’

‘If you like,’ said I carelessly; but in my heart I was delighted with the notion, as I ever have been in attempting anything new. ‘But you’ll want an apron.’

She looked at her dress, already torn, ruefully.

‘If I can find something amongst the linen to make up into an apron and a pair of sleeves.’

‘And a dress more suitable to your station than that.’

‘I’m afraid I can never find enough stuff for that.’

‘I don’t suppose you will. I shall have to go all the way to Tavistock for it. Those shoes of yours are all knocked out; they’re no good. And we ought to have a flat pan for the milk. Bread won’t last over to-morrow. Can you make bread?’

‘I can make a beefsteak pie.’

‘Can you?’ said I eagerly, quite put off my guard by a recollection of this delicacy that set my mouth watering.

‘Yes, and custards too,’ said she, her face lighting up responsively.

‘Blow custards! You can keep them for yourself. How about bread?’

She seemed doubtful of her capacity in this branch of domestic economy, but she offered eagerly to try.

‘We’ll have a go at it,’ said I; ‘it’s nothing but flour and water baked.’

My wife thought we should need soda or baking-powder, as in cakes, to lighten it.

‘I suppose you don’t care for pudding?’ she suggested.

‘Not much. We got it every Wednesday in prison.’

‘But I mean college puddings, and rice, and sago.’

I listened with the strangest feeling to the list. It was like opening a long-forgotten book, and recognising the passages that had fascinated me in the past.

‘There’s plum-pudding and currant-pudding,’ I said, supplementing her list.

‘And roly-poly—you don’t care for that,’ she hinted.

‘Oh, don’t I, though!’ I exclaimed, again forgetting myself.

‘I know I could make that if I had flour.’

‘There’s half a bushel in the sack at the bottom of the cupboard.’

‘And suet,’ said she, reflecting, ‘and I must have a rolling-pin.’

‘I’ll make you that.’

‘Can you?’

‘I should think so. There’s the spoke of a cart-wheel out there will make a fine un.’

‘Is there anything will do for a paste-board?’ she asked.

‘Oh, I’ll soon knock that up.’

‘We ought to have a flat pan to set the milk in,’ she said, after a minute’s consideration. ‘And where can we stand it to keep fresh and cool?’

‘Why, out at the back there, in that pile of granite, there’s a sort of cave where two great rocks lap over—that would be the very place. I thought of putting the cow in there, but I fancied it might be too cool for her.’

‘You don’t think the cats will get at it, Gregory?’

‘ Oh, I shall stop up one end with loose stones, and put a door at the other,’ I replied, as forgetful as she in this new excitement that there was as little likelihood of cats coming there as of chimpanzees.

‘ Do you really think you could do that without having a man?’ she asked, dropping her voice.

‘ Oh, you shall see,’ I replied confidently, already arranging in my mind where I should set my door-posts. I rose, feeling the necessity of finishing the stable at once, in order to begin on the dairy.

‘ But the pans?’ suggested Hebe.

‘ There’s a pencil, and I’ll give you a smooth piece of deal if you come out to the shed, and you can make a list of all the things you want on it. I’ll go over to Tavistock as soon as I’ve finished nailing up the boards. Don’t forget the suet and some glue; that pasteboard must be rabbeted.

Look round and put down everything, so that I don't have to go again for some time.'

She promised to forget nothing, and I went off to my work with a feeling of exhilaration that I was ashamed of later on when I cooled down. But my eagerness to finish the stable gave me no time then for reflection or cooling, and I was absolutely glad to see my wife when she came to the door later on.

'What time would you like tea, Gregory?' she asked.

'I shall be ready for it in about ten minutes.'

'Why, you have nearly stopped up the hole.'

She referred to the partition.

'Two more boards to nail on, that's all, and a bit of stuff to knock up here for a manger.'

‘ Is that end for the cow or the pony ?’

‘ It don’t matter which.’

‘ I should think the pony ought to go inside, because there’ll be more light near the door for seeing to milk the cow.’

‘ Why, that’s true ; I didn’t think about that.’

‘ Two heads are better than one,’ said she, with a faint smile. ‘ I’ll go and get tea at once.’

There was something pathetic, though I failed to see it then, in her endeavour to conciliate me—to sink herself to a level which even I might attain. But I presently had a proof that she still maintained womanly dignity.

The tea-things were neatly set on the table ; the teapot stood on the stove. Between us she had set a tumbler of water, in which were two or three wild-flowers.

‘There is no butter yet awhile,’ she said, as I seated myself.

‘Oh, I can do without it; pass us the bread,’ said I, stretching out my hand.

She glanced at my hand, and then looked steadily in my face without moving a hand. I perceived that I had not washed the grime off my hands.

‘Oh, I forgot that I am to be a gentleman,’ said I sourly, as I got up.

‘Or perhaps you forget what I am,’ she answered, without raising her voice, but rather in a tone of gentle reproach.

‘After all,’ thought I, going back from the stream after giving my face and hands a good wash, ‘one feels all the better for being clean.’

When I had finished tea I saddled the pony and brought him to the gate of the enclosure.

Hebe stood there with the list in her hand.

‘ Shall you be long ? ’ she asked.

‘ Yes ; four or five hours.’

We looked at each other in silence for a moment. Her air was so noble that it required more courage than I could muster at the instant to tell her I intended to lock her up in her room before I started ; she, reading my thoughts, spared herself and me the indignity of such an avowal.

‘ I will say “good-night” now ; I shall not be up when you return,’ she said ; and with a slight inclination of the head she turned and entered the house.

When I followed a minute afterwards she had gone up to her room.

I must have felt I was doing a shameful thing, for I went as noiselessly as I could up the steps and shot the bolt in the trap she had already closed.

Her pale, thin, lovely face haunted me as I rode moodily over the moor, and if the sinking of my heart was not due to remorse, I know not what it was.

END OF VOL. II.

[September, 1889.]



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